DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 373 329 CS 214 451

TITLE	Novels and Nonfiction Annotated Listing for English 10, English 13, English 20, English 23, English 30, English 33. Senior High English Language Arts.
INSTITUTION	Alberta Dept. of Education, Edmonton. Curriculum Standards Branch.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-7732-1187-X
PUB DATE	94
NOTE	155p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Learning Resources Distributing Centre, 12360 - 142 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T5L 4X9, Canada (Order No. 269135-01).
PUB TYPE	Reference Materials - Bibliographies (131)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC07 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Annotated Bibliographies; Controversial Issues (Course Content); *English Instruction; *Fiction; Foreign Countries; High Schools; *Nonfiction; Reading Material Selection; Teacher Developed Materials
IDENTIFIERS	*Alberta; Educational Issues

ABSTRACT

This annotated listing of fiction and nonfiction works suitable for use in Senior High English courses was written and developed by teachers, in Alberta, Canada. It contains 83 new titles and 44 titles carried over from the 1983 list. A specific edition of each of the novel and nonfiction titles in the list has been authorized because of such features as the translation, the foreword and back notes, the cover, and availability. A Canadian maple leaf identifies Canadian titles in the list. After an introductory section and a discussion of issues for English teachers, the listing is organized by course, and each course is divided into fiction and nonfiction categories. Appendixes present suggestions regarding challenges to book selection and the Alberta Education Policy on Controversial Issues. (RS)

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Senior High English Language Arts

NOVELS AND NONFICTION

Annotated Listing

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Senior High
English Language Arts

Novels and Nonfiction Annotated Listing

for

English 10
English 13
English 20
English 23
English 30
English 33

Curriculum Standards Branch

Alberta Education

1994

ALBERTA EDUCATION CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION DATA

Alberta. Alberta Education. Curriculum Standards Branch.
Senior high novels and nonfiction annotated listing.

ISBN 0-7732-1187-X

1. Nonfiction novel—Bibliography. 2. English language—Fiction—Bibliography. 3. English prose literature—Bibliography. 4. Language arts (Secondary)—Alberta. I. Title.

PN 3385 A333 1994 820

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alberta Education expresses its appreciation to those individuals and groups who assisted in the development and production of this annotated listing and acknowledges their contributions.

SENIOR HIGH NOVELS AND NONFICTION COMMITTEE

From December 1991 to April 1994, this committee carefully read hundreds and hundreds of books for this project, identified potential new titles for field validation and wrote the annotations contained in this document. Their work and commitment to this project is gratefully appreciated.

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Appreciation is also extended to the 53 senior high English teachers who volunteered as readers in December 1993 to validate small numbers of the proposed new titles and to provide suggestions for the annotations.

ALBERTA EDUCATION

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SPECIAL FEATURES IN THIS DOCUMENT

TITLE IN ITALICS	An italicized title in the Table of Contents indicates a book from the 1983 list that has been carried over to this 1994 list, but may, however, have been moved to a different course. All such titles are still in print and available, provide a valuable classroom study, and add balance to the new list. Titles that are out-of-print, or no longer available, were not considered for inclusion on this 1994 list; others were withdrawn because new titles provide more challenge at the course level or better balance for course selection.
AUTHOR DATES	The birth and death dates of the author have been included to provide an indication of the era in which he or she lived and wrote. A thorough search has been done for these dates, but where they have not been located, they are indicated by [?].
BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION	A specific edition of each of the novel and nonfiction titles has been authorized because of such features as the translation, the foreword and back notes, the cover, availability, etc. The bibliographic information noted for each annotation contains the publication date of the authorized edition. The original date of publication of the work, where known or where different from the above, is also included, and indicated by [original date]. Books that have been translated from another language have been so noted, and the name of the translator is also indicated. New editions of titles from the 1983 list were not reviewed in this project, and there may be more current editions available.
	The Canadian maple leaf identifies Canadian titles and can be found in the lower corner of the appropriate annotation pages. Of the 127 titles on this 1994 list, 31 per cent are Canadian.
WHITE SPACE	Teachers should note that a fair amount of "white space" exists on each annotated page. The intent is for teachers to have room to add related resources, such as texts, other novels, poems, stories, films, videos, or additional notes.
APPENDIX	An Appendix containing suggestions regarding challenges to book selection is included, as well as the Alberta Education Policy on Controversial Issues.
INDICES	Author and title indices are included at the end of this document to assist teachers who may wish to find titles written by a particular author or identify titles readily.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In December 1991, the Senior High Novels and Nonfiction Committee was established by Alberta Education to review the existing 1983 list of senior high novels and nonfiction recommended for senior high English courses, to review potential new titles, and to compile a new list. The committee's first task was to establish guidelines for selection. The guidelines used in the development of the 1983 senior high list and the 1990 junior high novels and nonfiction list were referenced.

SELECTION CRITERIA GUIDELINES

The following seven guidelines were used to select the resources in this 1994 listing. Please note that not all titles will meet **all** selection criteria guidelines, but the entire list of titles for each course should be balanced and reflect the criteria.

- Offer a variety of purposes, human experiences and values.
- Provide an interesting and a challenging reading experience suitable for the age, ability and social maturity of the students.
- Elicit a thoughtful response and a critical appreciation of literature.
- Illustrate literary merit, with a range of style and structure.
- Broaden student understanding of social, historical, geographical and cultural diversity.
- Develop a sensitivity to and an understanding of individual differences, such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, etc.
- Use language effectively and responsibly, and use language that is essential to the integrity of the work.

REVIEW PROCESS

The committee decided to organize this 1994 list by course, and divided each course into fiction and nonfiction categories. More than 1000 new titles were read from December 1991 to June 1993, and all titles under serious consideration were read by a minimum of four readers. In many cases, titles were read by most or all of the committee members. In addition, the titles on the 1983 list were all reread, and many of them have been retained on this new list. Titles that were out-of-print or no longer available were not considered for inclusion on the new list.

A list of 96 potential new titles was identified through the review process. Validation reviews were initiated. The potential titles all received an analysis to determine if tolerance and understanding guidelines had been met, and several books were submitted for Native or other content validation. More than 50 classroom teachers across the province also participated in the process by reviewing a few fiction or nonfiction titles for a specific course. All of the feedback gathered from these teacher readers and from the other reviews assisted the committee in making the final selections.

The new 1994 list for English 10, 13, 20, 23, 30 and 33 contains 83 new titles and 44 titles carried over from the 1983 list. Of these 127 titles, 93 are fiction and 34 are nonfiction. In terms of Canadian content, 31 per cent of the 1994 list is Canadian.

No list such as this is able to satisfy everyone, particularly if personal favourites have not been included. It is the hope of the committee that by describing the process of establishing criteria and making selections, our deliberations will be helpful to teachers selecting titles for novel and nonfiction studies.

TEACHER SELECTION OF TITLES

Each course offers a balance of titles with such considerations as various historical periods, novel structures, a variety of writing styles, male/female protagonists, Canadian content, etc. The annotations included in this document have been written by the committee members to offer information about each title. **The committee strongly recommends that teachers read the books prior to selection and carefully consider the sensitivities of both the student audience and the community.** To assist in this selection, some annotations indicate material that may be sensitive in some Alberta communities.

It is the classroom teacher who makes the final decision as to which book(s) will be used. **However, if an individual student, for whatever reason, is unable to read the book that has been selected, it is recommended that the option of an alternative choice be offered.**

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

The annotations in this document do not contain specific teaching suggestions. The *Senior High English Language Arts Teacher Resource Manual*, 1991 presents a sample unit for English 23 (pages 225–245), which provides suggestions for full length novel and nonfiction study. The unit does not identify specific titles for study, so many of the ideas can be adapted easily to the authorized titles. Generic cooperative activity outlines and sample evaluation forms are also included. Teachers can also refer to the introductory pages in the *Junior High Novels and Non-fiction Booklet*, 1990. It includes suggestions for promoting a response to literature in the classroom and some activities for teaching fiction and nonfiction which may be applicable to senior high.

AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES

The approved fiction and nonfiction titles on the 1994 list are available from a number of distributors and publishers. The Learning Resources Distributing Centre will not be stocking the titles on this list. Teachers or teacher–librarians ordering books should contact their favourite book distributors or United Library Services (Telephone 252–4426 Calgary or Fax 258–3426 or Fax 1–800–661–2806) or National Book Service (Telephone 438–1550 Edmonton, or 244–4420 Calgary, or 1–800–387–3178). The *Canadian Publisher's Directory* put out by *Quill and Quire* may also be helpful.

Since some books lend themselves better to small group or individual study rather than full class study, teachers may wish to consider purchasing smaller numbers of these titles. Some suggestions of this sort have been made in the annotations.

ISSUES FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS

In today's classrooms and communities, English teachers are often challenged by issues related to classroom work with students. This section addresses areas of concern for some educators, such as the need to incorporate more multicultural literature into their programs and suggestions for handling potentially controversial literature.

PROMOTING TOLERANCE AND UNDERSTANDING IN THE CLASSROOM

Teachers may wish to use the following questions to evaluate their efforts to promote tolerance, understanding and respect for diversity in the classroom.

- ** *Are my instructional strategies and assessment techniques sensitive, and do they recognize the diversity of individual needs in the classroom?*
- *Does the climate of my classroom promote respect for diversity? Take note of religious symbols, celebrations, minority groups, leadership opportunities for students, classroom rules and grouping procedures?*
- *Do I encourage links between my classroom and the community?*
- *Do any of my students have special needs (learning disabled, gifted and talented, recent immigrants, students of English as a Second Language, visual or hearing impaired, physically disabled)? To what extent can these needs be effectively met within the classroom? How do I balance their needs with the right of all students to learn?*
- *Do some authors or characters present bias and stereotyping? Where resources contain problematic content, do I use that content to promote critical thinking? Do students have the skills to recognize a slanted viewpoint? Can they counterbalance the discussion?*
- *Do I promote tolerance, understanding and respect through novel and nonfiction study?*

★ Source: Adapted from John Kehoe, *A Handbook for Enhancing the Multicultural Climate of the School*, 1984. Reprinted with permission of Pacific Educational Press, University of British Columbia.

EXPANDING STUDENTS' HORIZONS

Canadian multicultural, Native, world and historical literature can broaden the reading experience of students and, simultaneously, welcome many voices into the English classroom.

Some themes explored in such literature include the experience of immigration, cultural conflict in societies and families, the search for identity, changing roles of men and women, and prejudice and stereotyping. Sensitivity to human experiences and values is a prerequisite to working with literature of this scope.

By including authors with whom students can identify—ethnically, racially, personally—teachers can broaden student understanding of culture in literature. By reading such Caribbean works as *The Wine of Astonishment*, students may be encouraged to bring oral dialect into their imaginative writing. Because cultural or historical background is often required by readers of literature, English teachers may want to work collaboratively with social studies teachers. *Obasan*, by Joy Kogawa, or Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, for example, can be linked to social studies learning. Alternatively, teachers could teach a jointly developed unit.

There are several books on this new list written by or about Natives or containing Native characters. For further information about additional resources with Native content, consult the *Native Library Resources Bibliography* from Alberta Education's Native Education Project.

THE STUDENTS' RIGHT TO READ

The National Council of Teachers of English has published material known as "The Right to Read" which is addressed to parents and the community at large.

★*The right to read, like all rights guaranteed or implied within our constitutional tradition, can be used wisely or foolishly. In many ways, education is an effort to improve the quality of choices open to all students. But to deny the freedom of choice in fear that it may be unwisely used is to destroy the freedom itself. For this reason, we oppose the efforts of individuals or groups to limit the freedom of choice of others or to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large.*

★ Source: Excerpts from *The Students' Right to Read*, The National Council of Teachers of English, 1982, pages 5-7. Reprinted with permission of NCTE.

The right of any individual not just to read but to read whatever he or she wants to read is basic to a democratic society. This right is based on an assumption that the educated possess judgment and understanding and can be trusted with the determination of their own actions. In effect, the reader is freed from the bonds of chance. The reader is not limited by birth, geographic location, or time, since reading allows meeting people, debating philosophies, and experiencing events far beyond the narrow confines of an individual's own existence.

In selecting books for reading by young people, English teachers consider the contribution which each work may make to the education of the reader, its aesthetic value, its honesty, its readability for a particular group of students, and its appeal to adolescents. English teachers, however, may use different works for different purposes. The criteria for choosing a work to be read by an entire class are somewhat different from the criteria for choosing works to be read by small groups. . . . But the teacher selects, not censors, books. Selection implies that a teacher is free to choose this or that work, depending upon the purpose to be achieved and the student or class in question, but a book selected this year may be ignored next year, and the reverse. Censorship implies that certain works are not open to selection, this year or any year. . . .

Students and parents have the right to demand that education today keep students in touch with the reality of the world outside the classroom. Much of classic literature asks questions as valid and significant today as when the literature first appeared. . . . But youth is the age of revolt. To pretend otherwise is to ignore a reality made clear to young people and adults alike on television and radio, in newspapers and magazines. English teachers must be free to employ books, classic or contemporary, which do not lie to the young about the perilous but wondrous times we live in, books which talk of the fears, hopes, joys and frustrations people experience, books about people not only as they are but as they can be. English teachers forced through the pressures of censorship to use only safe or antiseptic works are placed in the morally and intellectually untenable position of lying to their students about the nature and condition of mankind.

The teacher must exercise care to select or recommend works for class reading and group discussion. One of the most important responsibilities of the English teacher is developing rapport and respect among students. Respect for the uniqueness and potential of the individual, an important facet of the study of literature, should be emphasized in the English class. Literature classes should reflect the cultural contributions of many minority groups . . . just as they should acquaint students with contributions from peoples [of other countries].

Freedom to Read Statement of the Learning Resources Council of Alberta Teachers' Association.

ADDITIONAL FREEDOM TO READ STATEMENTS

★*Intellectual Freedom comprehends the right of every individual to have access to all expressions of knowledge and creativity. This basic right requires that students be granted freedom to read as an integral part of their education. Because students require practice in handling the freedom to read, it becomes the responsibility of professional educators to make available material representing the widest range of interests, so that students may freely explore the world of ideas, be they popular or unpopular.*

Canadian Library Association Intellectual Freedom–Position Statement.

★★*All persons in Canada have the fundamental right, as embodied in the nation's* Bill of Rights, *and the* Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, *to have access to all expressions of knowledge, creativity and intellectual activity, and to express their thoughts publicly. This right to intellectual freedom, under the law, is essential to the health and development of Canadian society.*

★ Source: Excerpt from *President's Newsletter*, School Library Council, Alberta Teachers' Association, March 1972. Reprinted with permission.

★★ Source: Excerpt from *Intellectual Freedom–Position Statement*, Executive Council, Canadian Library Association, November 1985. Reprinted with permission of the Canadian Library Association.

CONTROVERSIAL GREAT LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM

Some books may contain issues or content that may be sensitive in some Alberta communities. The Toronto Board of Education has stated some arguments for the continued use of controversial books.

★*Some arguments for continued use of controversial books are:*

- *they may demonstrate growth in understanding and tolerance of cultural diversity over the years since they were written*
- *attitudes and opinions that were both current and socially acceptable in the writer's day may now be totally unacceptable*
- *opinions expressed by a character are not necessarily those of the author and therefore need not detract from the worth of the book. Some objectionable opinions are intended to illustrate the unsympathetic nature or lack of understanding of a character and certainly do not elicit support or approval from the student*
- *it is important to attempt to understand the value system of other cultures and other times. Different value systems that may now appear deplorable were nonetheless facts of life in different times and places and are legitimate subjects for study and discussion*
- *given the diverse nature and maturity of the student body, it becomes increasingly important to confront important issues and bring them into the open for discussion. Bear in mind that a student will have accumulated a variety of experiences and opinions shaped by family, community and the media*
- *the teacher's own abilities, awareness and sensitivity should shape the presentation of controversial material so that it will promote further understanding and sympathy rather than give or cause offense.*

The adoption of a position, such as this, should be backed up by policies for resource selection and book challenges. Investigate what policies your school system has in place to help prevent differences of opinions from becoming fullblown controversies.

★ Source: Adapted from *Bias, Controversy, and Censorship in Language Arts/English: A Teacher Guide*, June 1989. Reprinted with permission of the Language Study Centre, Board of Education for the City of Toronto.

To satisfactorily resolve a challenge, Alberta Education's *Controversial Issues Policy* of 1972 (revised in 1991) could be referred to as a means of support for a position. This policy and other suggestions for dealing with challenges to book selection, may be found in the Appendix.

The novels and nonfiction titles on this 1994 list were selected to provide opportunities for a challenging literary experience for Alberta high school students through the 1990s. Since some titles require a mature reader and contain potentially sensitive or controversial themes and content, teachers are encouraged to preread carefully and select those books that will provide their English students with a successful novel or full length nonfiction study.

THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

Mark Twain
1835–1910

Markham, ON:
Penguin Books, 1966.
[original 1884]
374 pages.

ISBN: 0140430180

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

Huck Finn, son of the town drunk, runs away to escape his father's brutality and the tender ministrations of the well-meaning woman who wishes to "civilize" him. He joins Jim, a runaway slave, who is fleeing to avoid being sold "down the river." The narrative traces the adventures of the two fugitives as they float down the Mississippi on a raft. The novel begins as a boy's adventure story, moves into a devastating criticism of society in the central part of the book, and returns once more to youthful adventure at the conclusion.

The strength of the novel lies in its delineation of character, its humour, its satire, and is an excellent basis for discussion of society and human nature. The novel also allows for discussion of such concepts as point of view, thematic development, plot structure and the characteristics of the picaresque novel.

The book reflects that the society of the time supported slavery and denied the slaves any opportunities. Jim's apparent ignorance, therefore, loses all taint of discrimination and becomes not only understandable but inevitable. It is the white society Mark Twain criticizes, not the black. However ignorant Jim may appear, he is immensely superior in his humanity and moral standards to the majority of the whites he and Huck encounter on their travels.

ANIMAL FARM

George Orwell
1903–1950

The animals on Manor Farm drive out their master, Jones, and take over and administer the farm, adopting new principles consisting of seven commandments. The last of these is: "All animals are equal." Conditions on the farm soon become oppressive again and the animals discover that, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others", especially the intelligent pigs that administer the rules and assume dominate positions.

This fable satirizes dictatorship and the abuse of power, integrating complex political ideas and paralleling closely the events of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath. Orwell believed that Stalin betrayed the Marxist revolution and wanted to expose the nature of Russian communism. *Animal Farm* is a satiric utopia, an indictment of dictatorship and the abuse of power.

The novel is reinforced by irony and symbolism, revealing both the good and evil aspects of society. The plot moves full circle from hopelessness to optimism to hopelessness, and is likely to generate a great deal of class discussion.

Middlesex, England:
Penguin Books,
1979.
[original 1945]
111 pages.

ISBN: 0451514696

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

THE CHRYSALIDS

John Wyndham
1903–1969

London, England:
Penguin Books, 1955.
200 pages.

ISBN: 0774010991

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

After a nuclear war in Labrador, civilization believes the devastation is a punishment from God; and as a result, rigidly structure society so that any deviation from the "norm" is considered to be seditious. David Strom leads a group of young people who have telepathic powers and when their deviation is discovered, they must escape. At the climax of the pursuit, David and his friends are rescued by the New Zealanders, members of a neighbouring society that depicts the next stage of evolutionary development where telepathic communication is accepted.

Two themes are strongly emphasized. First, humankind must be able to accept individual differences and to adapt to change, while intolerance leads to hate and the destruction of civilization. Second, ambition and pride may be destructive when one attempts to control all others.

The novel provides for interesting small and large group discussions. As with all speculative fiction, there may be concerns regarding future worlds with different ideologies.

DRAGONSBANE

Barbara Hambly
19[?] -

John, a dragonslayer, and Jenny, a mage, journey to kill the dreaded Morkeleb, the fiercest of dragons. Through a series of adventures, Jenny is able to search for truth and realize her destiny. Jenny's sense of purpose and growing awareness of her needs and desires provides a powerful ending when she realizes that she can become a dragon—all powerful, or a human wife and mother.

Interesting discussions will develop regarding good versus evil, the use of power, and the giving up of one's life in the aid of others. Although the novel is a fantasy, thematic links to our struggles against evil while searching for truth are universal to humankind.

The use of magic and sorcery does not demand that students believe in this fantasy, but rather it is a tool to develop plot. The strength of this novel is in its writing style, character development, and decision-making processes. Students should enjoy class discussions regarding the moral dilemmas encountered by Jenny and John.

New York, NY:
Ballantine Books, 1986.
Del Rey Book edition.
[original 1985]
341 pages.

ISBN: 0345349393

THE EDUCATION OF LITTLE TREE

Forrest Carter
1927[?]–1979

Albuquerque, NM:
University of New Mexico
Press, 1976.
216 pages.

ISBN: 0826308791

After his parents die, Little Tree, a young Cherokee boy, is brought up by his grandparents in a small mountain community in early 20th century America. He grows and matures as he learns about tolerance and understanding, while becoming sensitive to other people and the world of nature around him. Not only is Little Tree educated, but the reader also gains great respect and love for the Cherokee way of life. The story is told by Little Tree and is limited by his perceptions as a child, suggesting naivete and honesty. The novel should promote an understanding of and empathy for Native peoples, as well as pride in Native culture.

Portrayals of animals are both positive and sensitive, using some Native cultural symbols and their implications to life. The Cherokee are presented as thrifty, sensitive and full of love, while the Caucasians are seen as powerful and insensitive. Any stereotyping of Native or white cultures reflects the values of the characters and can be dealt with in the classroom context. It is recommended that critical thinking exercises be presented that would enable a student to obtain a more balanced perspective on the racial/ethnic, religious, social/economic, and political aspects of the novel. These issues should be discussed during the study of this novel. Physical violence, racial epithets, and profanity are reflective of the early 20th century.

Each chapter is anecdoted and could be discussed independently. The novel's humorous style and use of satire develop the story's gently mocking tone. While the novel uses an autobiographical voice, it is a fictionalized account using a child's perception to enhance the humorous style. Character development and point of view are also strong features of the novel. It may be most appropriate for either small group or individual study.

GREEN DAYS BY THE RIVER

Michael Anthony
1932–

This short novel tracing the universal journey from childhood innocence to adulthood is set in Trinidad. The narrative reveals the character of Shell, a young boy who blames his father for being ill and weak. Because of his father's health, the family is forced to move to a small village. Here, Shell begins to encounter conflicting and confusing emotions when dealing with girls and adults. When his father dies, Shell must assume adult responsibilities in order to help his mother pay for food, shelter and clothing. To this end, he is drawn to Mr. Gidharee, a man who possesses health, energy, an attractive daughter and a pack of fierce hunting dogs. Shell begins to see Mr. Gidharee as a father-figure and Mr. Gidharee, in turn, sees Shell as a potential son-in-law. Shell must sort out his feelings toward Rosalie, Gidharee's daughter, and another girl, Joan.

Because of the social and cultural context of the novel's setting, the characters' dialect may be difficult to understand at first, and some oral reading may assist students in grasping the rhythm of the language. Attitudes toward females exhibited by a few of the characters and some blasphemous language may be offensive to some students, and should be critically examined within the context of the novel. The skilled reader should seek to understand the prevalent attitudes, mores and customs of the social milieu from which the characters evolve.

The strength of this novel is in the presentation of Shell's struggles during his adolescent years, a theme that is universal regardless of society, ethnicity or origins.

Portsmouth, NH:
Heinemann
Educational, 1973.
Caribbean Writers
Series edition.
[original 1967]
192 pages.

ISBN: 0435980300

OLIVER TWIST

Charles Dickens
1812–1870

New York, NY:
Bantam Books, Inc., 1981.
Bantam Classic edition.
[original 1838]
419 pages.

ISBN: 0553210505

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

The overall tone of this novel is romantic and sentimental, and the characters are charming, but the events do reveal the miseries of the poor. It is also a bitter social criticism set in London during the early 1800s. Oliver, who is illegitimate, starved and ill-treated, eventually becomes involved with a gang of thieves and pickpockets. After many adventures, he finds both friends and fortune.

The plot provides for interesting discussion on the varied characters, most of whom are one-sided, and reveals the extremes of human nature. Dickens' novel reflects how society at that time discriminated against the Jews and the poor.

Experienced readers should enjoy the novel, and class discussion may lead to further research into that era. The events that surround Oliver Twist may well surround some of our own poor, and that should encourage some interesting discussion.

RIVERRUN

Peter Such
1939–

This moving story of the last of the Beothuks in Newfoundland, is told through the voices of the remaining three. Nonosabasut, last of the tall ones (204 cm), is leader of one small group that includes his wife, Demasduit, who is captured by the whites who then kill her husband, and Shawnadithit, last survivor, who dies in the home of some well-meaning whites in 1829. The unusual construction, the shifting point of view from character to character, is easily recognized and enables students to appreciate more sensitively the tragic events that led to the end of the Beothuks.

Spellbinding, lyrical and well written, this short and readable work leads to effective discussions on structure, style, imagery and symbolism, as well as to discussions on more earthy, controversial issues, such as the treatment of early settlers and resulting effects on Natives, differing lifestyles in early Canada, and the genocides that occur around the world today.

Toronto, ON:
Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1973.
145 pages.

ISBN: 0772006202

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

SILAS MARNER

George Eliot
1819–1880

Oxford, England:
Heinemann Educational,
1993.
New Windmill Classics
edition.
[original 1861]
202 pages.

ISBN: 0435126040

This classic is a relatively short, yet stylistically polished novel providing a social, moral, religious, and psychological commentary on 19th century rural England.

Eliot traces the life of Silas Marner, a skilled weaver in the village of Raveloe and a reclusive miser. His beloved gold is stolen but its place in his heart is taken by a small golden-haired child who mysteriously arrives at Marner's cottage, and whom Marner adopts and cares for. The plot has other mysterious and dramatic events, but it is essentially a fable of loss and redemption through love.

In spite of its brevity, this is a complex novel with a slow moving, two-fold plot that is united in the last third of the book. The vocabulary and use of dialect may prove challenging, but this edition contains a helpful glossary. There is also a good introduction and end pages of interesting "Activities" which are adaptable to students of different ability levels.

This may be a novel best reserved for a more advanced English 10 class, or for individual study.

SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES

Ray Bradbury
1920–

Suspense and foreboding emanate from the very beginning of two boys' involvement with the Carnival and Pandemonium Shadow Show. They are caught in an evil nightmare where the old turn young and the young turn old, mirrors steal souls, and the exhibits within a wax museum are of living people. Before they can escape, they must confront the ultimate evil. This fantasy develops the idea of a secret dream or wish, but after that wish is granted, things are never the same.

The plot develops the idea of youth and goodness versus the carnival of evil. Youth is presented as wise, while those who are older, especially males, are shown to be desirous of the qualities of youth. One of the themes of the novel is that our own fears may destroy us. While there is horror, there is no descriptive violence. The book provides an opportunity to look at language and the power of indirect description. There are some racial and religious references, but they are used as a backdrop for the social setting of the carnival.

This is an excellent novel for small group discussions or for those students who enjoy speculative fiction and would like to enhance their reading skills in this area.

New York, NY:
Bantam Books, 1963.
The Grand Master edition.
[original 1962]
215 pages.

ISBN: 0553280325

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

Harper Lee
1926–

New York, NY:
J. B. Lippincott Company,
1960.
296 pages.

ISBN: 044508376X

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

In Alabama, during the Depression, Scout, the protagonist, develops a growing awareness of good and evil in the world around her; racial and class prejudice within both the black and white communities, and the religious prejudices of the various sects of the area. Counterbalancing this are the positive qualities of compassion, sympathy, understanding and wisdom demonstrated by various characters, primarily Scout's father, Atticus.

Told from Scout's point of view, the novel is a look at the past: a child's experiences described with the perception of an adult. The novel deals with complex ethical issues, and may require a great deal of class discussion. Characters, such as Atticus, demonstrate that one individual can make a difference.

Treatment of blacks in Alabama is described clearly and movingly, and the historical time frame is accurate. Some of the characters use language indicating racial and class prejudices; however, this language reflects the attitudes and circumstances of the people at that time. The novel promotes tolerance and understanding through the main characters of Scout and Atticus Finch.

WAITING FOR THE RAIN: A NOVEL OF SOUTH AFRICA

Sheila Gordon
1927–

This South African tale of a friendship between two boys, one black and one white, shows a harmonious relationship during their childhood—oblivious to the discord around them. As the boys grow older, their differences are accentuated. Unlike Tengo, Frikkie has many opportunities for advancement in society. Tengo is shocked by the injustice to and maltreatment of his people on the farm, in the townships and cities. When Tengo and Frikkie meet again, both their dreams have been altered by the demands of their respective societies.

Through this rather simple narrative, the writer presents opposing views, factions and precepts of South African society. The innocence of youth is transformed by the burdens and tensions of a troubled society. While this subject matter may be challenging and sensitive to some students, the strength of this novel is its structure, character development, point of view, setting and symbolism.

New York, NY:
Bantam Books, 1989.
[original 1987]
214 pages.

ISBN: 0553279114

WHO HAS SEEN THE WIND

W. O. Mitchell
1914–

Toronto, ON:
Seal Books, 1982.
[original 1947]
293 pages.

ISBN: 0770417701

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

This Canadian classic tells the story of Brian, a boy growing up in a small prairie town during the thirties. He gradually comes to accept life as he finds it—imperfect, sometimes brutal and tragic, but ordered somehow by a benevolent, all-pervading power.

Failure and frustration are often visible as Brian looks at the life of his small town. Superficially, the view is tragic despite its whimsically humorous atmosphere. Brian encounters defeat, cruelty, injustice, misunderstanding and death. But, in spite of his personal contact with the harsh realities of existence, he emerges with a view of life that is essentially positive: birth and death, struggle and failure, are a part of nature and belong in the scheme of things. The book offers rich material for the study of symbolism, prose style, character, setting, plot structure, philosophy and psychology.

The novel can be approached from the philosophical, the psychological or the literary point of view. A thorough study should include all aspects.

THE WIZARD'S TIDE: A STORY

Frederick Buechner
1926–

The Wizard's Tide is the story of a childhood, and the struggle of one family, in particular the parents, to succeed during the Great Depression. Through the innocence of a child's voice, the story of the Schroeder family unfolds. It is this innocence, told with simplicity and beauty, that draws the reader into the world of childhood. Teddy, the narrator, reveals the joy and sorrows of his little sister, Bean, and himself while growing up in an upper-middle-class family who experience a tragic fall, emotionally and economically, during the Depression. This tale speaks of healing the inner child that lives within.

Teachers using this novel will likely need to provide students with background information on the Great Depression, King Edward VIII and Wallis Simpson, and the socio-economic attitudes of the upper classes of that era.

Although this is a short novel, only 104 pages, the teacher should not be deceived by its brevity and apparent simplicity. Buechner's narrative is deceptively simple and provides meaningful material for advanced English 10 classes.

New York, NY:
HarperSanFrancisco,
1990.
104 pages.

ISBN: 006061160X

THE BOOK OF SMALL

Emily Carr
1871–1945

Toronto, ON:
Clarke, Irwin & Company
Limited, 1966.
[original 1942]
168 pages.

ISBN: 0772002231

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

Emily Carr, one of Canada's great painters, recalls her growing-up years in Victoria, British Columbia, in the 1870s. "Small" is her nickname as the youngest of three sisters: Big, Middle and Small.

This series of short, readable, lively literary sketches provides a sense of a Victoria which, even in its pioneer days, displays the Englishness and eccentricity that becomes part of its character. It also reflects the sensitivity to vivid detail of the artist as a child. The writing is simple, unaffected; the tone warm, often whimsical and humorous.

The Book of Small might be used to encourage students to write their own autobiographical sketches—or writing up the reminiscences of family members—with particular attention to imitating Carr's selectivity, economy and eye for detail. It would also be suitable for oral reading or readers' theatre.

MY FAMILY AND OTHER ANIMALS

Gerald Durrell
1925–

Persuaded by her eldest son, Larry, Mrs. Durrell sells her home in England and takes her family to live on the island of Corfu for five years. The amusing and eccentric antics of the family are rivalled only by the author and youngest child's reminiscences of his boyhood. Gerald's fascination with animals resulted in incidents, such as snakes living in the bathtub and magpies ransacking the house. Freed from the rigours of regular schooling, Gerald spends his time investigating nature and acquiring a miscellany of oddly named pets. Upon their departure from Corfu, a custom official characterizes the Durrells as "a travelling circus and staff."

Durrell's deft touch in creating humour is rare in nonfiction. Students may wish to use his writing as a model for creating their own comedy. The book inspires personal response and may be presented for full class, small group or individual study.

Toronto, ON:
Penguin Books, 1977.
[original 1956]
301 pages.

ISBN: 0140013997

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

Walter Lord
1917–

New York, NY:
Bantam Books, 1956.
[original 1955]
119 pages.

ISBN: 0553205099

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

On April 12, 1912 the Titanic, the "unsinkable" British liner, began its maiden voyage from Southampton to New York with over 2000 passengers, including the elite of British and American society. When the Titanic hit an iceberg and sank, over 1000 people drowned. This account emphasizes a fatal sense of invulnerability on the part of owners, crew and passengers. The fairly rigid class system in the early part of the 1900s is seen, to some extent, as determining the fate of all.

A Night to Remember is retold as a moment-by-moment, person-by-person account, from the sighting of the deadly iceberg to the rescue of survivors by the Carpathia, five hours later. The emphasis is on individual human reactions to the disaster as it occurs, and on the memories of survivors, 63 of whom the author interviewed in the process of writing the book. In spite of the number of people followed in the account, the story is relatively fast-paced and gripping. Lord's style is simple, clear, dispassionate; the vocabulary undemanding.

The sinking of the Titanic holds a continuing fascination for students which is increased by the saga of the search for, and discovery of, the wreckage. This book could be used as part of a "survival" nonfiction unit; or in conjunction with the equivalent type of "disaster" fiction, to examine significant differences in approach and treatment.

RICK HANSEN: MAN IN MOTION

Rick Hansen and Jim Taylor
1957- 1937-

Born in British Columbia, Rick Hansen was disabled at a young age, but never let this inhibit his athletic or other endeavours. While in his 20s, he undertook a world Man in Motion tour, in his wheelchair, to draw attention to persons with disabilities, their aspirations and needs.

This is the modern success story of a man who gives hope and encouragement to all people, as well as to those in circumstances similar to his own. His activities, supported by many volunteers, created a recognition of and commitment to an awareness of the hopes, dreams and feelings of those with disabilities.

The book promotes critical thinking and an evaluation of personal values and attitudes toward people with disabilities. Students could be encouraged to look for similarities among all people. For example, Rick has a romance with his physiotherapist, Amanda Reid, whom he later marries. While Rick Hansen's Man in Motion tour occurred in the mid-1980s, he remains an excellent role model of a very successful individual.

Markham, ON:
Penguin Books Canada
Ltd., 1988.
[original 1987]
206 pages.

ISBN: 014011713X

THREE CAME HOME

Agnes Newton Keith
1901–

Toronto, ON:
McClelland and Stewart
Limited, 1947.
[original 1946]
317 pages.

ISBN: 0771045026

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

Members of the Keith family were captives in a Japanese prison camp from 1942 to 1945. Harry Keith was a British civil servant in North Borneo at the time of the Japanese invasion. He, his wife Agnes, and their young son, George, were interned and treated as prisoners of war. Agnes Keith recounts the story of their day-to-day life from her secret diaries, which she managed to hide and save until the family was eventually released.

Keith writes a brave and compassionate tale with gaiety and courage. It is a very human account, impressive because of the honesty of the writer; there is no whitewashing or blackballing of characters—not all the prisoners are good, not all the captors are evil. One of the strengths of the book is Keith's continued insistence that it is war that is the evil, and its inevitable effect on people on both sides.

The style is personal, chatty, and very readable; the format is in chronological diary form and easy to follow. The book might be used in conjunction with other diaries, or accounts of other types of imprisonment, with a view to studying the ways in which humans deal with isolation and suffering.

THE BLUE SWORD

Robin McKinley
1952–

New York, NY:
The Berkley Publishing
Group, 1987.
Ace Books edition.
[original 1982]
248 pages.

ISBN: 0441068804

When Harry Crewe's father dies, she leaves her home and travels to the frontier where her elder brother, Richard, is stationed. Living under the care of her brother's superiors, Sir Charles and Lady Amelia, Harry finds life confining until Corlath, ruler of the neighbouring kingdom of Daria, comes seeking an alliance against the threat of Thurra and his empire. Inspired by his "gift", or "kelar", Corlath believes that Harry is important to the survival of his people, and so he kidnaps her. She trains as a king's rider, and in the end defies Corlath, whom she has come to love, and saves his kingdom. Corlath admits his misjudgement, and this fantasy ends happily.

In this novel, women are shown to be equally powerful and worthy of respect as are men. The relationship between Harry and Corlath demonstrates the importance of love and respect in keeping people together. Tolerance for other cultures and for the differences between people is encouraged. The book may appeal particularly to female readers, though the action should attract the interest of all students.

CHILDREN OF THE RIVER

Linda Crew
1951–

Sundara flees Cambodia with her aunt, uncle, grandma, and two nephews to the United States, where they struggle to make a living and adapt to a new culture. Sundara falls for an all-American boy, but their different political and cultural backgrounds make a relationship impossible until they are able to reach an understanding of each other's heritage. Sundara also has to face her overwhelming feeling of responsibility for her niece's death.

A tender, moving and believable story, this novel identifies and highlights the difficulties of moving into a different culture, especially when the past involves violence and sexual abuse. The flashbacks are well-integrated, and students in small group or full class study should find an interesting blend of internal and external conflicts that lead naturally to research. The book strongly emphasizes the idealistic universal message that individuals have a personal responsibility to make a positive difference.

Regardless of origin or mother tongue, students should be able to identify with the intergenerational conflicts and can be expected to respond strongly to the differences between Cambodian and North American culture and politics.

New York, NY:
Dell Publishing, 1989.
213 pages.

ISBN: 0440210224

DARE

Marilyn Halvorson
1948–

Toronto, ON:
General Paperbacks,
1990.
[original 1988]
191 pages.

ISBN: 0773672672

An angry and confused 15-year-old Dare and his 12-year-old brother, Ty, have lived with their grandmother in the same small Alberta town for five years. When they are left orphaned after her stroke, Laura McConnell, a substitute teacher and rancher, lets them live with her. Dare is the typical rebel character—swearing, drinking and driving, fighting, and even spending some time in jail. However, Dare matures as he learns to accept responsibility and confronts his part in his mother's death.

The realistic dialogue and intensity of Dare's emotions enable students to identify with this character's turmoil, yet realize how feelings can be changed without losing face. Effective characterizations of a rebellious, defiant teenager and sensitive and believable adults add to an action-filled story that is best suited for full class study.

DEATHWATCH

Robb White
1909–

This fast-moving and easy-reading narrative revolves around the tale of Ben, a young geology student working as a hunting guide. Ben finds himself locked in an intense struggle to survive when the expedition he is on turns into a manhunt.

Madec, an oil executive, hires Ben to escort him through the Southern California mountains in search of bighorn sheep. Madec accidentally kills an old prospector, and Ben's sense of justice demands that he report this incident to the authorities; however, Madec wants to ignore the death and continue the hunt. These two men are chained together by their different outlooks on the situation. A struggle to outwit each other soon develops.

Deathwatch presents clear contrasts in setting, mood and character types. A study of foreshadowing, symbolism, conflict and plot could also be undertaken. The ending, although abrupt, provides opportunity for open-ended discussion and various writing projects relating to decision making and the question of ethics.

Toronto, ON:
Doubleday Canada,
1972.
228 pages.

ISBN: 0440917409

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

FISH HOUSE SECRETS

Kathy Stinson
1952–

Saskatoon, SK:
Thistledown Press Ltd.,
1993.
[original 1992]
159 pages.

ISBN: 1895449103

Chad and his father arrive at his Nova Scotia grandparent's house, and it is here where Chad mourns and accepts his mother's death. He meets Jill, a Halifax runaway, and while helping her elude the authorities, Chad comes to terms with his own grief, guilt and rebellion. References to emerging sexuality and abortion reveal empathy for others and are dealt with sensitively.

Chad and Jill have typical teenage actions and characteristics, but their portrayals go beyond stereotyping. The clashing of youth and parents, the need to assert oneself, the need to communicate, the need for self-esteem and the need for independence are some of the discussion topics that this book should generate. The novel's style, using inner chapters, reveals both Chad's and Jill's personal struggles and their willingness to forgive and begin again. It could be used either for small group discussion or for full class study.

HATCHET

Gary Paulsen
1939–

As 13-year-old Brian Robson flies to visit his father in the Canadian wilderness, the pilot dies from a massive heart attack. Brian crash-lands the plane in a remote lake and survives a two-month ordeal with only a hatchet, a few camping skills, and his instinct for survival.

This action-packed adventure offers plot detail and character development. Students should be interested in the physical and emotional growth of Brian, as well as his ability to cope with insurmountable odds.

Brian's fragmented thinking is juxtaposed with the narrator's sequential descriptions. This writing style should interest English 13 students. The novel is an easy read, but can provide interesting discussions in small group or full class situations.

Toronto, ON:
Puffin Books, 1988.
[original 1987]
195 pages.

ISBN: 014032724X

HUNTER IN THE DARK

Monica Hughes
1925–

New York, NY:
Avon Books, 1984.
[original 1982]
131 pages.

ISBN: 0380677024

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

In this short novel, 16-year-old Mike Rankin comes to terms with himself, his family and his fear of death. The author develops relationships and conflicts through a rapidly-moving plot with realistic characters and dialogue. The survival theme is developed through the goal of taking one more hunting trip.

Tact and delicacy should be used in dealing with the mortality theme in this novel as many students have some personal knowledge of someone who has, or had, a terminal illness. The family's attitude of denial in this story may mirror the students' own experiences. This novel could facilitate discussions leading to creative writing and/or research.

LYDDIE

Katherine Paterson
1932–

Set in the United States during the Industrial Revolution, this story of unions and personal courage follows Lyddie, a young girl who goes to work in the garment factories where she learns to weave and read—thereby finding her future. Lyddie's struggle for independence, for her rights as a woman, and for her rights as a factory worker, reflect the social conditions of that time.

The novel should encourage interesting discussions on character development, on the conflict between right and wrong, and on the value of education. Gender references, and the treatment of the birth of a child out of wedlock according to the social mores of the 1800s, are also potential topics. Some students might be interested in researching the emergence of unions and women's rights.

While the topic is universal, students may wish to consider the changing roles of women and examine the issues of women's rights today. This could promote some lively discussions in the English 13 classroom.

Toronto, ON:
Puffin Books, 1992.
[original 1991]
182 pages.

ISBN: 0140349812

NEVER CRY WOLF

Farley Mowat
1921–

Toronto, ON:
McClelland-Bantam,
Inc., 1979.
Seal Books edition.
[original 1963]
164 pages.

ISBN: 0770421377

In this fictional narrative, Farley Mowat embarks on a mission to investigate claims about the wolves' role in the diminishing caribou population. Isolated in the frozen tundra among howling wolf packs, Mowat develops a respect and admiration for these animals. The narrative is developed with humorous recollections of encounters between man and animal. In his journal, Mowat writes of observations, enlightened feelings and lonely encounters with the wolves. His findings conclude that the wolves have been wrongfully blamed for the destruction of other animals in the North.

This deceptively simple narrative with its humorous details provides another perspective about an animal that has been falsely maligned. The appeal of this book is in its presentation, simplicity and anecdotal recording.

THE PEARL

John Steinbeck
1902–1968

A Mexican pearl diver, Kino, and his wife discover a valuable pearl. To Kino, this prize symbolizes comfort, security, health and happiness; and his dreams become larger and more urgent. Three attempts are made on Kino's life as thieves try to steal the pearl. Desperation and greed alter the lives of all who covet the wealth of the pearl.

In this novel, Steinbeck captures the ethnic flavour of this Mexican family, using a smooth-flowing style; many references reflect the rich musical heritage of the people. Detailed descriptions of the land and sea are presented.

The main characters are representative of human frailties. The structure is conducive to plot mapping, and the study of symbols, conflict and character. The novel can be used easily for either small group or individual study.

New York, NY:
Bantam Books, 1947.
[original 1945]
118 pages.

ISBN: 0670545759

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

WHITEOUT

James Houston
1921–

Toronto, ON:
General Paperbacks,
1991.
[original 1988]
175 pages.

ISBN: 0773673458

Jonathan Aird, a rebellious and fatherless 17-year-old city boy, is sent to a remote Arctic settlement on Baffin Island to fulfill his community work requirements as part of a rehabilitation program. Jonathan must come to terms with the harsh reality of the environment. While doing so, he matures and learns to accept responsibility for his actions.

Jonathan's self-discovery is paralleled by his initial stereotyping of the Inuit and his final understanding of their ways. As he learns to admire their strength and courage, he develops into a mature young man. A strong emphasis on action and plot is highlighted by accurate descriptions of life in the Arctic.

The story contains characters of Scottish, Inuit and Polish origins, and these individuals are portrayed in traditional/stereotyped roles. Inuit religious beliefs are presented and the novel provides an empathetic look at Inuit culture, thus demonstrating a need for acceptance and understanding.

YULETIDE BLUES

R. P. MacIntyre
1947–

Lanny, a young hockey player, plans to stay with his favourite aunt while his parents are on holidays. Before their departure, this aunt, an artistic eccentric, attempts suicide and Lanny must go to a reclusive great-aunt's place. During his stay, he breaks his leg, and discovers that his best friend has become a thief. Lanny comes to terms with individual differences and deals with the emotional, physical and psychological limitations of both aunts.

Students can easily relate to this episodic, humorous story that should lead to excellent class discussion and personal reflection on issues, such as delinquency, sexuality, aging, depression, loneliness, personal responsibility and peer pressure. The teenage vernacular will be appealing to students as well. Because the novel contains some swearing and references to sexuality and suicide, the book might best be offered for either small group or individual study.

Saskatoon, SK:
Thistledown Press Ltd.,
1992.
[original 1991]
237 pages.

ISBN: 1895449049

Z FOR ZACHARIAH

Robert C. O'Brien
1918[?]–1973

New York, NY:
Dell Publishing Co., Inc.,
1974.
256 pages.

ISBN: 0440999014

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

Sixteen-year-old Ann Burden believes she is the last survivor of an atomic war. She has subsisted by eating "safe" food from the nearby village store, farming her father's land as best she can, and keeping her sanity by writing a diary. The discovery of another individual, Loomis, leads to doubt and confusion, resulting in an escape from the comfortable valley. The conclusion amplifies Ann's courage and desire for self-preservation.

The narrative is straightforward, the vocabulary terse, and the structure chronological. Students should be able to comprehend the actions of the characters and go beyond the plot to understand the emotions that Ann describes so well in her diary. This novel can provide for interesting discussions regarding speculative fiction.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MISS JANE PITTMAN

Ernest J. Gaines
1933–

New York, NY:
Bantam Books, 1972.
[original 1971]
246 pages.

ISBN: 0553205854

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

Ernest Gaines taped Miss Jane Pittman's reminiscences in 1962 when she was already over 100 years old. In essence, the book is a searching portrayal of life as a black woman living in the deep American south. Her account details the suffering and humiliations that blacks faced in their daily lives. However, through it all, Pittman maintains her faith. As a result, this uplifting perspective celebrates the unfolding of a determined spirit in the face of adversity.

Gaines writes in a clear, readable style, using Pittman as the first person narrator. The structure is chronological and well suited to an average English 13 class.

A CHILD IN PRISON CAMP

Shizuye Takashima
1928–

Montreal, PQ:
Tundra Books, 1989.
[original 1971]
97 pages.

ISBN: 0887762417

Artist Shizuye Takashima records in words and paintings, her experiences as a child in a prison camp. At the age of 11, she and her family, along with other Japanese Canadians, were removed from their homes on the West coast of Canada and sent by the Canadian government to an internment camp in the interior of British Columbia. The family lost their civil rights, their home, and their business. Takashima vividly describes the actual camp, the housing, the schooling, the humiliation, and the loss of freedom and rights.

The book is an example of racism in Canadian history. Not only does it describe the actual happenings, but Takashima's story shows the effects of childhood experiences on one's life. It was not until 1984 that the Canadian government condemned this internment and offered financial restitution.

Teachers may need to explain the historical background before beginning the book. Sensitivity to the subject is needed for successful presentation of this personal account. Discussion of why and how people react in a time of crisis is important. This book would work well with a combined English/social studies approach and could lead to student research on such topics as World War II, the atom bomb, Japanese culture, the human will to survive, and prejudice. Either full class or small group study would be effective.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Paul Brickhill
1916–1991

New York, NY:
Fawcett Crest, 1978.
[original 1950]
223 pages.

ISBN: 0449237176

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

In a suspenseful and spine-chilling thriller, a World War II PoW tells how more than six hundred British and American air force officers escaped from Stalag Luft III. Under cunning leadership, these prisoners outsmarted, even manipulated, their Nazi captors into unwittingly assisting them in their escape; which was made possible through persistence, camaraderie, humour and the coordination of a multitude of talents. The author follows the experiences of key individuals through to eventual escape or death, and includes the later war trials and the sentencing of the Nazi officers who ran the stalag.

The book is written in short chapters full of action and adventure. Brickhill inserts sketches of the compound, equipment used in the escape, maps and drawings. He uses technical vocabulary when describing the construction and excavation of the tunnels. Even though this book was written just five years after the war ended, Brickhill remains fairly objective in his portrayal of prison life. He writes with a sense of excitement, a touch of humour and dwells on the enormity of the task rather than the daily drudgery of living in a prison.

ON THE LINES: THE ADVENTURES OF A LINESMAN IN THE NHL

Ron Finn with David Boyd
19[?] - 19[?] -

Ron Finn tells a story of hockey from another point of view—that of a linesman in the National Hockey League. After he realizes he will not make the "big" league as a player, Finn begins to take up officiating. As a linesman, he is able to relate many important hockey incidents from the best view in the house. Finn's love of hockey has continued throughout his life. To him, hockey is a part of Canadian culture and tradition, and he displays a positive outlook toward life and people through his association with hockey.

This book will appeal to any student who has a strong interest in sports. Finn talks of not only the hockey players from the 1970s and 1980s, but also of others who are behind the "stars". He reinforces the view that, in order for a sport to continue at any level, there must be more than the "stars".

Coarse language is used in the book, but it is an easy read and will appeal to students interested in hockey. The foreword is written by Wayne Gretzky. Individual or small group study would be effective and could lead to research in areas such as hockey biographies, aspects of the National Hockey League, media in sports, violence in sports, and careers in sports.

Oakville, ON:
Rubicon Publishing
Inc., 1993.
142 pages.

ISBN: 0921156464

TERRY FOX: HIS STORY

Leslie Scrivener
1950–

Toronto, ON:
McClelland and Stewart
Limited, 1981.
176 pages.

ISBN: 0771080174

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

Leslie Scrivener's sensitive account of the Marathon of Hope is based on Terry Fox's personal diary of the journey. The book begins by describing Terry's first day of the cross-Canada run and then fills in his background. He was diagnosed with osteogenic sarcoma just after entering university. The amputation of his leg, and subsequent drug treatment, terminated Terry's studies but did not dampen his determination to conquer his illness. His personal pledge to run across Canada was the result. In four and a half months, Terry ran two-thirds of the distance before he was again stricken with cancer. His run was given national news coverage and raised 18.5 million dollars for cancer research. Since his death on June 28, 1981 Canadians have continued to raise funds in his memory.

Scrivener follows Terry's diary closely, quoting him directly in journalistic style and filling in details of the run from her own observations and from interviews with Terry, his brother Doug, friends, family and roadside observers. The story is an objective account of one of Canada's modern heroes, and concludes with an epilogue written by Terry.

Terry Fox is portrayed as a man determined to reach his goal. This universal theme contributes to a reader's knowledge and understanding of self. The book is enjoyable and thought-provoking, eliciting an emotional response from all who read it.

WHY SHOOT THE TEACHER

Max Braithwaite
1911–

Braithwaite writes about his first year of teaching in a small school district during the Dirty Thirties. He talks, in a series of light and humorous anecdotes, of the Depression years and the people who survived them. His experiences with school dances, Christmas concerts and political rallies present a good description of social activities in rural Saskatchewan.

The author's style is direct. He creates a concise set of episodes that facilitate easily organizable units for classroom discussion. The vocabulary is medium range. The point of view is that of an insecure, self-doubting young man who encounters employment, meager subsistent living, and poverty on the prairies. The book is recommended, not only for its historical perspective, but also for its readability and humour.

Toronto, ON:
McClelland and Stewart.
1965.
162 pages.

ISBN: 0771015992

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

THE APPRENTICESHIP OF DUDDY KRAVITZ

Mordecai Richler
1931–

Harmondsworth, England:
Penguin Books, 1964.
[original 1959]
319 pages.

ISBN: 0140021795

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

This novel traces Duddy's important relationships with his grandfather, Simcha; his father, Mack the Hack; his French-Canadian girlfriend, Yvette; the "Boy Wonder", Jerry Dingleman; his brother, Lennie; his friend, Vergil, and some other characters. Even before Duddy leaves high school, his every action is motivated by the need to acquire enough money to buy land. During his first summer job as a waiter in a posh Laurentian hotel he sights a piece of resort property he covets and, throughout the novel, uses any method to obtain money to purchase this land.

Much of the comedy is situational and satirical, with the dialogue in colloquial, often coarse language. Duddy's use of a more formal and correct style, including his change of name to Duddy Kane, is reserved for situations when he is "wheeling and dealing." Richler develops the novel as satirical comedy, directed not only against the culture, setting and characters of the novel, but also Duddy's actions must be analyzed in the light of any individual who is totally devoted to rising above his own social station.

Some students may have difficulty comprehending Duddy's single-mindedness, his motivation and drive at the age of 17, but the plot movement and character schemes sweep readers along, if only to find out who Duddy will "con" next.

BAROMETER RISING

Hugh MacLennan
1907–1990

Set in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1917, *Barometer Rising* is a story of entrapment and colonization. The focus of the novel is as much on the city as it is on its inhabitants. This work is a study of catastrophe: the explosion of the ship Mont Blanc in the Halifax Harbour, the burning of the city, and the raging blizzard that followed. The elements of earth, fire and water purge the city as well as the novel's characters. Havoc by nature is paralleled to the distant destruction of World War I and the more immediate personal plights of the characters.

The lives of Penelope Wain and Neil Macrae are the centre of the character study. Presumed dead by Penelope, Neil returns home to reveal the truth about his military action overseas. The lovers are reunited only hours before the Halifax explosion occurs.

The graphic description of physical devastation is balanced by minute details of character study. Halifax is symbolically reflected in the strong but isolated characters. Occasionally, the language used is graphic and may be considered offensive by some.

The time frame of the novel is short. The story begins Sunday, December 2 and ends Monday, December 10, 1917. The events of these eight days provide a window through which we view the years that bring the characters and culture to this precise historical moment. The work is an investigation of how time is both arrested and accelerated by catastrophe. The city is levelled, and the novel closes with the suggestion that new life and hope will be built from ruin.

Toronto, ON:
McClelland & Stewart
Inc., 1989.
[original 1941]
235 pages.

ISBN: 0771099916

A BIRD IN THE HOUSE

Margaret Laurence
1926–1987

Toronto, ON:
McClelland & Stewart
Inc., 1989.
[original 1963]
197 pages.

ISBN: 0771099851

A Bird in the House is a collection of closely connected short stories set in the small Manitoba town of Manawaka in the 1930s and '40s. Each story presents an episode in the growing awareness and maturity of Vanessa MacLeod, from the age of 6 to about 20. The same family characters appear and reappear: on her father's side the Connors, dominated by the uncompromising patriarch Grandfather Connor; on her mother's side the MacLeods and the gentler but equally unyielding Grandmother MacLeod. Amongst them they present a vivid picture of the Scottish–Irish protestant values that pioneered the West and can still be detected today. In many of the stories Vanessa sees herself rebelling against her grandfather, but in maturity, comes to recognize, reluctantly, that she is his "monument."

Margaret Laurence has identified this work as being "semi-autobiographical." The young Vanessa, who plans to be a writer, records with shrewd observation, sympathy and humour the tensions within the family. Vanessa, like Laurence in her growing years in a small prairie town during the Depression, develops "the sight of her own particular eyes."

Each story is well-crafted and can be studied separately, with focus on the use of narrative voice, character development, irony, symbolism and theme. The book can also be read as a whole as a varied chronicle of a girl's growing up, with the opportunity for individual or small group presentation on how each story contributes to the total impression.

BRAVE NEW WORLD

Aldous Huxley
1894–1963

A few hundred years into the future, a carefully-controlled society has been established in which science reigns supreme. Reproduction, from fertilization of the egg to birth and after, is a laboratory process. Workers are mass-produced according to specifications. Family life, and its related emotional involvements, are forbidden. However, in New Mexico, an area of primitive culture is kept for scientific study. There, a young man is found who is the offspring of a forbidden alliance between two visiting research workers. The young man is a "savage", self-educated with the aid of an old copy of Shakespeare's plays. As an experiment, the young man and his mother are brought to London, where the mother dies shortly thereafter. The son, appalled by a society that stifles all beauty and all humanistic endeavour, eventually commits suicide.

Rather than merely a story of human beings living in a world of the future, the book is an examination of that world. The reader's attention is directed to the mechanical and philosophical aspects of the society. Appreciation of such a society requires an understanding of satire. Discussion could centre on such topics as the importance of the arts and humanities to the quality of human life; the problems arising from the artificial and controlled propagation of the species; the breakup of family life; the use of drugs; promiscuous sexuality; government control.

This novel requires teacher assistance to guide most students to an understanding and appreciation of the specific elements of Huxley's moral satire.

New York, NY:
Harper and Row, 1969.
[original 1932]
206 pages.

ISBN: 0060830956

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

CAT'S CRADLE

Kurt Vonnegut
1922–

New York, NY:
Dell Publishing Company,
1974.
[original 1963]
233 pages.

ISBN: 0440511496

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

Cat's Cradle is narrated by a young American writer named Jonah, who is collecting material for a book to be called The Day the World Ended (the day the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima). His research takes him to the fictional and fantastic Caribbean republic of San Lorenzo, where he is caught up in events that lead to the end of the world. The end, however, is not fire, but ice. And the agent of destruction is "ice-nine," which alters molecular structures and locks all moisture into rigidity. This rigid misapplication of science produces a world in which people cannot choose to be human; they choose, instead, to die.

The combination of science fiction, fantasy, comedy, satire, and a deliberately choppy narrative, make it difficult on a first reading to see the moral and spiritual values that Vonnegut is asserting. Some readers may misinterpret the novel as satirizing all organized religion.

Nevertheless, Vonnegut's novel is a comedy, not a tragedy. The author's humour and playfulness permeate the novel, although the humour is sometimes grim and sardonic, and the playfulness can be bizarre and fantastic. The tone is not pessimistic or despairing. Critical satire, particularly of technology, is combined with a sympathetic treatment of humanity's strengths and weaknesses.

DINNER AT THE HOMESICK RESTAURANT

Anne Tyler
1941–

Abandoned by her husband in 1944, Pearl Tull raises their three children on her own. The novel opens as Pearl, on her deathbed, contemplates her life. Her reveries are the framework for the plot line which follows each of the children through childhood to adulthood. The connections made and paths followed by each reveal obsessions, hates and passions, which are rooted in the life of the family. These elements have affected decisions made by the characters, and the ways in which they have influenced each other, as well as others who have entered their lives. Jenny is strong, deliberate and controlled in her goals and self-discipline but cannot deal with the emotional issues of her relationships. Cody is obsessed by the drive to be economically successful, to control and manipulate but is never able to be satisfied or to curb his personal jealousies. Ezra, the unwitting hub of the family, is driven by an obsession to mold the Tulls into the perfect family. Characterization is strong and deliberate, and the emotional isolation of each is believable in spite of the eccentricity of the Tulls.

The writing is straightforward and the flashback technique is effectively used. The tone is bittersweet and invites the inquiring mind to search for motive and consequence in the obvious dysfunction of this family.

New York, NY:
Ivy Books, 1992.
First Ballantine Books edition.
[original 1982]
343 pages.

ISBN: 080410882X

ETHAN FROME

Edith Wharton
1862–1937

New York, NY:
Charles Scribner's
Sons, 1970.
[original 1911]
192 pages.

ISBN: 0684174871

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

This tragic love story is set in a wintry and bleak New England. It is told by an observer who comes into the community of Starkfield (well-named) twenty years after the events and is curious about Ethan Frome. Local residents tell him what they know, and the story is retold of Ethan's suppressed love for Mattie, a young cousin of his sickly wife, Zena. Their love is initially unspoken, deeply felt, but hopeless. Eventually, desperate at the thought of losing each other, they attempt suicide on a toboggan run. The ironic ending is suggested by the narrator at the start, but the reader is still kept in suspense throughout.

Ethan Frome is a novel with an almost perfect, seamless form and with a deceptively simple but very evocative style. It is very short and easy to read, but requires a fairly mature reader who can appreciate the narrative and descriptive skills, as well as Wharton's keen psychological revealing of character. It is excellent for the teaching of narrative techniques, particularly novel structure and economical character delineation. It would be interesting as part of a thematic unit on choices or the sense of identity.

FIFTH BUSINESS

Robertson Davies
1913–

Toronto, ON:
Penguin Books
Canada Ltd., 1977.
[original 1970]
266 pages.

ISBN: 014004387X

"My lifelong involvement with Mrs. Dempster began at 5:58 o'clock p.m. on 27 December 1908, at which time I was ten years and seven months old." Thus begins Dunstable Ramsey's lifelong journey into the inner realms of hagiography, magic, guilt, psychology, religion and the theatre. The story begins in Deptford, a small village in turn-of-the-century Ontario. An errant snowball thrown at Dunstable causes Mary Dempster to slip on the ice, go into labour, and deliver her son Paul 80 days early, which in turn causes her to go "simple." Since the snowball was aimed at him, Dunstable develops a lifelong sense of guilt, which he tries to absolve by proving Mrs. Dempster to be a true saint.

The story follows Dunstable through childhood, World War I, his teaching post at a private boy's school and on various journeys around the world studying saints, and the dual world of history and legend. As well, much of the novel focuses on his relationship with his "lifelong friend and enemy" Boy Staunton. It is paradoxes such as this that Davies uses, not only to develop plot and character, but to reveal several of his themes.

There are two scenes of a sexual nature in this novel, which serve as vehicles in developing Dunstable's character. One occurs in his youth when he discovers Mrs. Dempster and a tramp copulating in the local gravel pit; the second occurs late in his life when he is seduced by the hideously beautiful Liesl.

This is a richly comic, offbeat novel which should appeal to most English 20 students.

FRIED GREEN TOMATOES AT THE WHISTLE STOP CAFE

Fannie Flagg
1941–

New York, NY:
McGraw-Hill Book
Company, 1988.
[original 1987]
403 pages.

ISBN: 0070212570

The narration of this novel is controlled by Mrs. Threadgoode, a colourful elderly woman who is living in the Rose Terrace Nursing Home in the 1980s. She slowly unravels the history of the people of Whistle Stop, Alabama to Evelyn Couch, an unhappy, middle-aged woman who accompanies her husband on weekly visits to his mother, Big Momma. As the visits and weeks go by, Mrs. Threadgoode tells the story of the two powerful women who ran the Whistle Stop Cafe, a cafe known for fine barbecue, good conversation and fair play. Superimposed on this main plot is the modern dilemma of Evelyn, which is gradually shaped, as she herself is, by the inadvertent influence of Mrs. Threadgoode's storytelling.

Both plots are based on the theme of victimization. The primary plot centres on murder as a result of racial prejudice and sexual inequality in the 1930s; the secondary plot explores contemporary issues of self-discovery and the role of the middle-aged, middle-class woman of the 1980s.

The flashback technique and narration style may cause problems for some students. Flagg deals with interesting but sensitive issues, and the language, which is graphic and racist at times, may offend some readers. Students should critically examine the negative behaviours exhibited by a few characters. There are violent scenes in the novel, but they are necessary to the representation of particular characters and the development of the plot. This novel may be most appropriate for individual or small group study, or offered on an optional basis.

Fannie Flagg writes with strength, humour and poignancy. The important individuals in this novel take responsibility for one another, and in so doing, shape their own lives of integrity and worth.

THE GREAT GATSBY

F. Scott Fitzgerald
1896–1940

Nick Carraway, the narrator of this novel, moves to New York and rents a home in the Long Island colony of West Egg. From a relatively neutral vantage point, Nick is able to observe the lives of those he encounters. The contrast between poverty and wealth and the struggles to achieve an "American Dream" are depicted through each character.

A reflection of the historical values and morality of the 1930s becomes evident as Nick examines the plight of Gatsby in his pursuit of Daisy, Tom Buchanan's wife, Tom Buchanan's adultery, the escapades in New York, and the adherence to the superficial values of riches and self-gratification. Despondent by what he sees and learns, Nick leaves New York.

This edition contains introductory material, a glossary, and study suggestions. The novel provides students with an opportunity to examine structure, style, character development, narrative voice and point of view, and symbolism and setting.

Essex, England:
Longman Group UK
Limited, 1991.
[original 1925]
185 pages.

ISBN: 0582060230

JANE EYRE

Charlotte Brontë
1816–1855

Toronto, ON:
Bantam Books, 1981.
[original 1847]
448 pages.

ISBN: 0553210203

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

Jane Eyre recounts her life through a series of dramatic, even melodramatic, events: an unhappy orphaned childhood, her grim schooling, employment as a governess, a brief period of happiness as the intended bride of her employer, Mr. Rochester, a disastrous wedding day disruption, her desperate flight and near destitution, and finally, independence and a happy reconciliation with the blinded Rochester.

The choice of Jane Eyre as first person narrator places her firmly at the centre of the story. The style is highly subjective, mirroring the inner development and spiritual and emotional struggles of Jane who is, from the first, a strong character refusing to accept her appointed place in society and holding a "passionate sense of the dignity and needs of her sex." Jane is not the traditional heroine: she is neither pretty nor passive. She possesses an independent moral force which pervades the novel.

As a mid-19th century novel, it is interesting to study as a forceful and realistic examination of a woman's struggle for self-fulfillment in an era that had yet to come to terms with such issues.

THE JOY LUCK CLUB

Amy Tan
1952–

Jing-mei, also known as June, is invited to take her late mother's place in a mah-jong foursome and begins a powerful and compelling journey recounting the stories of immigrant Chinese mothers and their very American daughters. Chapters alternate the very diverse stories of the lives of the older and younger generations, and promote empathy for mothers and daughters alike. Characters are alive, complicated and human, but some are manipulated and treated with disrespect and denigration. The novel is an especially rich source for character studies that would allow students to apply critical thinking skills in judging people and their actions. The powerful bonds and persistent tensions between generations and cultures are illuminated in poetic and imaginative language and narrative.

The book provides much insight into Chinese and Chinese-American lifestyles. The chapters about the mothers' lives in China cover a difficult time in its history, and the novel includes examples of the mistreatment of women, as well as violence, death, robbery and abortion. There is some use of vulgar language. Hardships, poverty, family pride and the fear of losing face dominated the lives of the mothers; however, they survive incredible hardships and still strive to help their daughters.

Some research on Chinese culture should be done by the teacher or students. The importance of fantasy as a strategy in Chinese culture should be discussed with students. While many students of Chinese origins may welcome the opportunity to read and discuss their culture, there should be sensitivity to the discomfort that can accompany an in-depth exploration of one's culture.

Each chapter could be dealt with individually, though a study of the entire novel deepens the understanding of characters and themes. The oral nature of the writing suggests reading aloud, readers' theatre or other such activities. This novel speaks strongly to Canadians; whether immigrants, children of immigrants or long established residents; of mothers and daughters; and to varying perspectives of divergent cultures, experiences and expectations.

New York, NY:
Ivy Books, 1990.
First U.S. Ballantine Books edition.
[original 1989]
332 pages.

ISBN: 0804106304

LORD OF THE FLIES

William Golding
1911–1993

New York, NY:
Coward-McCann, 1962.
[original 1954]
243 pages.

ISBN: 0698102193

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

A group of English schoolboys, being evacuated during a nuclear war, are stranded on an uninhabited tropical island. Under the leadership of Ralph, who is staunchly supported by the pragmatic Piggy and the visionary Simon, all goes well initially. But irrational fears arise threatening the boys' sense of security. Irresponsible behaviour increases; the children, under the dictatorial influence of Jack, rapidly sink into savagery. Simon is mindlessly and brutally killed. Evil has been unleashed. At the culmination of the story, help arrives in the person of a naval officer; ironically, the boys will return to an adult world where the apparent order of civilization is threatened by the same forces of disorder they have just experienced.

Golding has said that his purpose in the novel was to trace the defects of society back to basic defects in human nature. Several elements combine to illustrate the forces of reason and morality at war with the dark forces of human nature. The same evil forces prevail in the adult world as well.

Characterization, conflict, plot development, foreshadowing, irony, suspense, imagery and symbolism are prominent aspects. A careful reading of the book reveals an allegorical and critical view of modern society. The tightness of structure, the power of the narrative and the imaginativeness of the writing give a dramatically forceful depiction of the "darkness in the human heart".

MY NAME IS ASHER LEV

Chaim Potok
1929–

Asher Lev, an Hasidic Jew, is the son of two important members of Brooklyn's Ladover community. This novel tells of the conflicts he faces between his artistic talent and his deep religious faith and traditions. He is expected to follow the traditions of his family and faith, and work to help spread Ladover Hasidism when he comes of age. However, even at a young age, Asher is a gifted artist, and it is this gift that moves him into conflict with his community, faith and father. In the middle of this clash between father and son is Asher's mother, who becomes embroiled in a painful struggle to remain loyal to her husband and to her son. As a result of her suffering, Asher, now in his late teens, creates two symbolic paintings of her crucified between her husband and Asher. These two paintings bring the conflict to an explosive ending, and send Asher into exile to Paris.

This novel is a demanding one for student and teacher alike. Students may require information on the differences between Judaism and Christianity, and care must be taken to ensure that no misconceptions develop about either. Equally important, students must be aware that Hasidic Jews are representative of only one sect of the Jewish faith.

The novel is suitable for an above average English 20 class.

New York, NY:
Fawcett Crest, 1972.
350 pages.

ISBN: 0449234983

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

OBASAN

Joy Kogawa
1963–

Toronto, ON:
Lester & Orpen Dennys,
1981.
250 pages.

ISBN: 0140067779

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

Obasan depicts the evacuation, internment and dispersal of British Columbia's Japanese Canadians during World War II. Naomi and her brother are separated from their mother and father and others of their extended family, and are raised, during the war years, by their aunt (Obasan) and uncle.

Despite being treated as outcasts, the characters maintain their identity, dignity and self-worth at a time when racism and intolerance were accepted and promoted in Canada.

Contrasts between hope and despair, anger and resignation, beauty and ugliness, and pleasure and pain are presented through calm documentation. One of the strengths of the novel is its poetic and lyrical style, which should inspire personal response and provide a model for student writing.

THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

Ernest Hemingway
1899–1961

An old Cuban fisherman, Santiago, who has lived with the hope that he will catch the largest fish in the ocean—does. Without appropriate fishing equipment or sufficient food, he uses his wit and skill to conquer this prize, a large marlin. Throughout the struggle he is buoyed by the memories of his youthful, competitive arm-wrestling and his baseball hero who never gave up. Badly cut, exhausted and hungry, Santiago begins the long sail home with his large fish, only to fight off numerous vicious sharks who are after an easy meal. In the course of a day and a night, the prized marlin is completely consumed by ocean scavengers. Santiago arrives home in the night to a deserted dock, single-handedly secures his boat, and furls the sail. Manolin, a devoted young friend, finds him close to death the following morning.

Written in short, descriptive sentences and with minute detail, Hemingway draws the reader into Santiago's struggle. The novel is one long chapter emphasizing the extended battle. Hemingway makes use of figurative language, foreshadowing, irony, allegory and symbolism. Although teachable as a story of personal struggle, there are deeper implications. Santiago is figuratively struggling with life: its obstacles and triumphs.

New York, NY:
Charles Scribner's
Sons, 1952.
127 pages.

ISBN: 0684718057

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

THE QUEEN OF OCTOBER

Shelley Fraser Mickle
1944–

Chapel Hill, NC:
Algonquin Books of
Chapel Hill, 1992.
[original 1989]
301 pages.

ISBN: 1565120035

This is the story of 14-year-old Sally Maulden, who is living with her grandparents in Coldwater, Arkansas while her parents are getting a divorce. She meets a variety of interesting, and often eccentric, people in Coldwater and matures in the process.

This is a sympathetic story of a girl eventually coming to terms with a fairly common family situation. Her initial anger with her parents' "bust-up" gives way to tolerance and a learning "to love herself." She also learns to understand her aging grandparents and the variety of off-beat characters of different races and backgrounds that she encounters.

The simple, straightforward narrative avoids sentimentality, and the tone is warm and humorous. Colloquial language, occasional racial slurs, and frank prejudices reflect the sometimes stereotyped characters, but lead to increased understanding and sensitivity, all reinforced through a child's voice and perceptions.

THE ROAD PAST ALTAMONT

Gabrielle Roy
1909–1983

Eight-year-old Christine, a young girl from St. Boniface, Manitoba, eloquently describes her adventures and presents the reader with impressions of her mother, Eveline, her grandmother, and the neighbours of her childhood.

This novel is divided into four sections, each of which is a complete story and could be read as such. Each section describes a journey: to the grandmother's house on the edge of the Manitoba prairie; to the lake; from one side of Winnipeg to the other in a mover's cart; and to Altamont, a country of memory and dreams that may or may not exist. For Christine, these journeys recalled from childhood to adulthood serve as a foundation for her writing.

The tone of each adventure is nostalgic and should engage student interest. Roy's writing can also be studied in terms of structure and style. This delightful first person narrative is easy to read and is ideal for small group study.

Toronto, ON:
McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1989.
Translated from the French by Joyce Marshall.
[original 1966]
152 pages.

ISBN: 0771098561

A SEPARATE PEACE

John Knowles
1926–

New York, NY:
Bantam Books, 1959.
196 pages.

ISBN: 0553104403

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

During World War II, the boys in a New England preparatory school eagerly anticipate the day when they will turn 18 and be drafted. Gene causes Phineas, his best friend, to fall from a tree and severely fracture his leg, thus ending Phineas' hopes of ever enlisting. Phineas returns to school and appears to have accepted his new limitations, but Gene is guilt-ridden. He is accused of purposely causing the fall. Phineas, angry and disbelieving, accidentally falls again and dies, leaving Gene with a reinforced sense of his responsibility in the death.

The plot moves swiftly and the characters are well-developed. Symbolism adds to the texture of this novel, and the emotional moods of gloom and sorrow make this a powerful and moving work. Knowles' characterization is an effective topic for class discussion.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Charles Dickens
1812–1870

Set in London and Paris during the French Revolution, this is the story of Doctor Alexander Manette, his daughter Lucie, and Charles Darnay. Dr. Manette, having been unjustly imprisoned for crimes committed by the Marquis of St. Evremonde, is called to identify Darnay at a trial in London years later. Darnay is accused of treason and is only saved by Sidney Carton, a dissolute man who bears a striking resemblance to Darnay. Darnay and Carton become friends of the Manette family and Darnay eventually marries Lucie. After the birth of their first child, Darnay returns to France at the height of the revolution to rescue an old servant of his aristocratic family, the St. Evremondes. Caught, imprisoned, and sentenced to death, Darnay is rescued by Carton who then dies in Darnay's place. Darnay and Lucie are reunited in England.

This classic novel has a complicated plot replete with intrigue and suspense. The important element in the novel is the portrayal of the social conditions of Dickens' era, with such themes as "violence begets violence," "the gap between rich and poor," and the "sacrifices required of individuals to overcome poverty and the abuse of power." While not precisely accurate from a historical point of view, this novel does give the reader a sense of history.

This edition contains biographical notes on Dickens and a helpful introduction. Teachers may wish to offer the novel in a humanities unit, or study the novel at the same time that the French Revolution is being discussed in social studies.

Markham, ON:
Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1985.
Penguin Classics edition.
[original 1859]
410 pages.

ISBN: 0140430547

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

Arthur C. Clarke
1917–

Markham, ON:
Penguin Books Canada
Ltd., 1991.
[original 1968]
221 pages.

ISBN: 0451450639

This science fiction novel, with a new introduction by Clarke, explores the origin and development of humankind. It begins as early civilization is visited by aliens from outer space, and follows human progress to the time of space travel.

When a mysterious object called TMI is detected close to Saturn, a manned-mission flight is launched to determine if other life forms exist in the Universe. Guided by HAL, an almost-human computer, the voyage ends in chaos and David Bowman, the only surviving crew member, encounters the unknown by himself. Isolated from Earth, David experiences a shocking journey and undergoes a transformation that changes his life forever.

This novel presents an intriguing plot and an unusual view of humankind. The philosophical concepts, the symbols and ethics regarding computers and technology, should arouse student interest, particularly in small group study.

THE WINE OF ASTONISHMENT

Earl Lovelace
1935–

Lovelace presents the history of a Trinidadian Spiritual Baptist ("Shouter") community, from the time when the sect's practices of worship were banned in 1917 until the ban was lifted in 1951. This edition has a good introduction which deals with both contextual issues and characterization, thus providing a solid starting point.

The novel is excellent social history, but social history made vivid and immediate by a first person narrator—Eva, a black peasant woman who has lived through these years. The rhythms of her dialect and her eye for the significant details of life, are the strong points of this novel. Some students may need assistance with the Trinidadian dialect, and oral reading might be helpful in this regard.

Major characters in the work show different reactions to colonialism. Ivan Morton chooses an "English" education, losing touch with his community as a result. Corporal Prince chooses to serve his colonial masters, and deals even more callously with his people than do they. Bolo is courageous and defiant, wanting to aid his people, yet unable to direct his anger effectively. Bee, in some ways a Christ-figure, is heroic in his spiritual growth and adherence to his ideals. Lovelace's characters all have human strengths and weaknesses, and he presents them with sympathetic insight.

Colonialism, oppression, civil rights, religious beliefs and the value of human dignity are major issues in this novel, and students should critically examine them in order to gain a more balanced perspective. Some research may also be required in order to enhance meaning and students' understanding of the social and historical context of the novel.

Oxford, England:
Heinemann International
Literature and Textbooks,
1986.
[original 1982]
146 pages.

ISBN: 0435988808

WYRD SISTERS

Terry Pratchett
1948–

Toronto, ON:
Penguin Books Canada
Ltd., 1990.
[original 1988]
319 pages.

ISBN: 0451450124

"(Starring Three Witches, also kings, daggers, crowns, storms, dwarfs, cats, ghosts, spectres, apes, bandits, demons, forests, heirs, jesters, tortures, trolls, turntables, general rejoicing, and divers alarums.)"

Terry Pratchett identifies the magic and mystical world of the kingdom of Lancre. Another of his Discworld novels, *Wyrd Sisters* is the rollicking story of three witches who, while gathered around their cauldron, are interrupted by murder and mayhem. Worse yet, they are burdened by the sudden arrival of a royal baby. The sisters give the prince away to a travelling troupe of actors, and assume their troubles are over. However, their lives are further complicated by the appearance of the King's ghost, who petitions them to recover his child and restore the kingdom to the rightful heir.

This fantasy novel is designed with clever allusion and word play. The dialogue is rich and engaging and the imagery imaginative and colourful. Plot complications are funny and fast-moving, and the role of the occult is not to be taken seriously in this work. The tone is richly comic and cleverly delivered tongue-in-cheek.

Granny Weatherwax and the spell sisters provide a comic characterization in a farcical plot, which is a counterpoint to *Macbeth*. The use of language is a delightful modern parody of Shakespearean word play. The book should provoke some interesting discussion on style and satire, and may be most appropriate for individual or small group study, or on an optional basis.

AN AMERICAN CHILDHOOD

Annie Dillard
1945–

New York, NY:
Harper & Row Publishers,
1988.
Perennial Library edition.
[original 1987]
255 pages.

ISBN: 0060915188

An American Childhood focuses on the memories of Annie Dillard's childhood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Dillard particularly focuses on the nuances of her growing up that bring meaning and beauty to youth. Her writing style, which is simple and direct, paints clear and vivid accounts of her youth, and provides an excellent model for detailed student personal writing.

Do not be deceived by the word "American" in the title. This is a collection that transcends national boundaries and can easily be used, understood and enjoyed by Canadian students. Many of Dillard's memories are common to Canadian youth and should offer insight and delight. In particular, Dillard's accounts of winter in Pittsburgh should ring true for Canadians.

The author's partisan views of the wars between the Natives and Caucasians as childhood memories are based upon the literature of the times which she read as a child. There is some stereotyping of Natives in these sections. As well, Dillard reveals her childhood anti-Catholic bias. These issues of stereotyping and negative images should be critically examined by students during this nonfiction study.

An American Childhood is a sensitively written work of nonfiction that lends itself to personal response essays for an advanced English 20 class. The book may be most appropriate for individual or small group study.

DEATH ON THE ICE: THE GREAT NEWFOUNDLAND SEALING DISASTER OF 1914

Cassie Brown with Harold Horwood
1919–1986 1923–

Cassie Brown documents the 1914 Newfoundland disaster in which a series of blunders, and some callous misjudgements resulted in the deaths of 78 sealers. This "investigative journalism" is based on a meticulous study of primary sources, such as newspapers, court records, transcripts and interviews. Maps and photographs are provided for clarification.

The author reveals an underlying sympathy with the sealers, who are treated with indifference by their skippers and by ship owners who are concerned only with profit. A new perspective is provided on the whole topic of sealing: the men are the victims, not the seals. It is debatable whether or not students will be able to see this irony, but they might be encouraged to do some similar research into the conflicting sides of a public concern, or into similar current problems in Newfoundland and the Maritime provinces.

The dramatic qualities of the account override the amount of historical detail. The dialect used should present no problem to the average reader.

Toronto, ON:
Doubleday Canada
Limited, 1974.
[original 1972]
270 pages.

ISBN: 0385050372

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

FROZEN IN TIME: UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF THE FRANKLIN EXPEDITION

Owen Beattie and John Geiger
1949– 1960–

Vancouver, BC:
Douglas & McIntyre,
1992.
[original 1987]
166 pages.

ISBN: 1550540483

This is an account of the investigative scientific expeditions led by Dr. Owen Beattie, a forensic pathologist at the University of Alberta, to the Arctic grave site of three of the sailors from the doomed Franklin expedition. This 1848 British expedition to find a North-West passage ended in the mysterious disappearance of all 129 crew members. The mystery has aroused speculation for more than a century.

The first four chapters set out background information: the nature and personnel of the Franklin expedition, and the documentation of previous findings. The rest of the book is a painstaking, detailed account of the exhumation of the frozen and well-preserved remains and the subsequent solution of a 133-year-old mystery. Beattie, and a team of Alberta scientists, applied the techniques of physical anthropology to investigate the Franklin remains in the same way that modern forensic science determines the causes of death. Thus, the book combines the elements of a good detective story with history and science.

The account is scientific and the descriptions detailed without approaching the macabre. There may be readers whose fascination is moderated (but more likely increased) by the vivid photographs of the bodies and by the clinical description of autopsy methods, or hints of cannibalism. Further research and study projects should promote lively discussion.

THE GHOST WALKER

R. D. Lawrence
1921–

Toronto, ON:
HarperCollins Publishers
Ltd., 1991.
HarperPerennial edition.
[original 1983]
242 pages.

ISBN: 0006377041

The author is a naturalist and an environmentalist. In this book, Lawrence spends ten continuous months observing a cougar in its natural habitat. He describes his interest in and previous experience of the study of the puma and his decision to settle on a specific territory in the Selkirk mountains for an extended field study. He tells of his preparation for living in isolated territory and details precise observations of many kinds of wildlife: bears, wolverines, porcupines, pack rats.

His eventual discovery of one puma, which he calls Ghost Walker, is followed by a close study of its behaviour and the development of what Lawrence calls, his own kind of strange, extrasensory ability to communicate with the animal. He describes not only his observations of the puma, but also the gradual intensification of his own senses through isolation and patient concentration.

The work is well-written, easy to read, and has enough suspense and stylistic skill to hold student interest. Lawrence's experiences as a naturalist and writer are evident, and the association between man and animal is not sentimental.

METAMORPHOSIS: STAGES IN A LIFE

David Suzuki
1936–

Toronto, ON:
General Paperbacks,
1988.
[original 1987]
284 pages.

ISBN: 077367215X

This autobiography to 1988, by David Suzuki, adds "some meat to [his] electronic persona." Suzuki organizes the book as a series of transformations in his life, which he identifies as the metamorphoses necessary to the development of the human as well as of the fruit fly.

The early chapters are particularly interesting because of the author's candid examination of the "hybrid" quality which he sees as an essential part of being Japanese-Canadian. Suzuki identifies, without rancor, the racism and suspicion that sent his Japanese family to internment in interior British Columbia during World War II. Along with changes in his personal and family life, Suzuki comments on his career in genetics, his teaching, and his role in the media. It is heartening throughout to note Suzuki's emphasis on, and loyalty to, his Canadian identity.

The last two chapters seem rather disjointed, but in them Suzuki examines such dilemmas as "genetics and social responsibility" and "the media: news versus truth." The book might be useful in a humanities approach, as an introduction to a variety of related discussion topics such as Canadian history and social justice, or the ethical roles of genetics and the media.

THE MOON BY WHALE LIGHT: AND OTHER ADVENTURES AMONG BATS, PENGUINS, CROCODILIANS, AND WHALES

Diane Ackerman
1948–

New York, NY:
Vintage Books, 1992.
[original 1991]
240 pages.

ISBN: 0679742263

This collection of four "nature" essays originally appeared in *The New Yorker* magazine. Ackerman, author of bestselling *A Natural History of the Senses*, describes her adventures in field studies of creatures that have not always had good press: bats and crocodilians, as well as the more popular whales and penguins.

The approach is personal, perceptive and fresh, without being cute. Bats are discovered to be "shy and winsome creatures," and wry connections are often made with the human animal, such as the penguins' view of humans as freakish fellow specimens who "stand upright, travel in groups, talk all the time, sort of waddle." Ackerman corrects common misconceptions and myths, asks curious questions, and provides new and shrewd observations from her own experience of a 20-million bat cave, an alligator farm, a whale study station and an Antarctic expedition.

Developing sensitivity in both scientific and human terms, the essays make easy and fascinating reading, suitable for a range of student abilities and interests: natural history, biology, the environment, adventure. They might be used separately, with small groups of interested students or for individual study.

THE BUMBLEBEE FLIES ANYWAY

Robert Cormier
1925–

New York, NY:
Dell Publishing, 1991.
Laurel-Leaf edition.
[original 1983]
241 pages.

ISBN: 044090871X

Sixteen-year-old Barney Snow can't remember what life was like before he came to the experimental clinic for the terminally ill. He mistakenly believes that he is a control subject and that it is all the other patients who are sick. However, while he helps a fellow patient, Mazzo, Barney unexpectedly uncovers the secret that he too will die.

The construction of the Bumblebee, a car, on the rooftop of the clinic, and its ultimate flight, are the result of the love, the compassion, and the empathy the boys share with, and for, each other. The flight does question assisted suicide and moral obligations to the terminally ill.

The theme needs to be dealt with sensitively and requires a great deal of acceptance and understanding. Small group discussions leading to full class discussions may facilitate increased comprehension of the novel. It is eloquently written, and students should have no problems visualizing the characters and the action. It is a compelling story.

DANCES WITH WOLVES

Michael Blake
1943–

Under ironic circumstances, Lieutenant Dunbar is assigned to an abandoned prairie army outpost. Isolated in the wilderness, Dunbar is drawn irrevocably to the nearby Comanche camp where he begins a cultural odyssey that changes him forever. He gradually becomes part of the proud nomadic people who fascinate him so much. Finally, he faces a critical choice by the inevitable movement of the army against his new home and people.

Although lengthy, the story line is fast-paced and should hold student interest. Specific characterization, although interesting, is secondary to the study of the moral dilemma that Dunbar faces; essentially this is a story of one man's choices. The plot has the classic elements of isolation and survival; it is the study of "civilized man" and what that means to Dunbar, and more importantly, what that means to the reader.

The writing is descriptive and image-laden and has the ability to transport readers to the world Dunbar inhabits. His motives are essentially understandable and noble in spite of the brutal and tragic elements of his life.

New York, NY:
Fawcett Gold Medal,
1988.
313 pages.

ISBN: 0449134482

DEAR NOBODY

Berlie Doherty
1943–

London, England:
Hamish Hamilton Ltd.,
1991.
152 pages.

ISBN: 0241130565

Helen, the main narrator of the novel, is pregnant as a result of a brief sexual relationship with a young man named Chris. Her letters to her unborn child, whom she calls "Nobody", are a record of her anxieties, her confusion and her growing maturity. At first, she hates the unborn child and attempts, unsuccessfully, to abort it. As her pregnancy progresses, the letters to "Nobody" develop a very real bond. When Helen gives birth to her baby, she names her daughter Amy, a name meaning loved one, or friend.

Chris, in contrast, has no sensitivity. He has some short-lived feelings of guilt, but runs away from the consequences of his actions. Chris shares the narration with Helen, and his thoughts and deeds show that he cares for no one but himself. Only at the end of the novel does he begin to admit his weaknesses.

The issues in this book are difficult and, for some readers, perhaps controversial. Yet this British author's focus is clearly on the importance of moral choices. There are no depictions of sexual intercourse, or even of childbirth. Throughout her novel, Doherty emphasizes the importance of responsible behaviour, of self-knowledge and of love.

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

Jack Higgins
1929–

After intense training, a small force of German paratroopers lands on the Norfolk coast of England in November 1943, with the aim of capturing Winston Churchill.

This action-packed wartime thriller contains elements of heroism, duplicity, bloodshed, irony and surprise. The theme, though certainly subordinate to plot and character, focuses on the fact that war is a fight for survival and, therefore, will expose many people to danger. This novel is an excellent vehicle for the study of plot development.

London, England:
Pan Books Ltd., 1976.
[original 1975]
347 pages.

ISBN: 0330246305

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON

Daniel Keyes
1927–

New York, NY:
Bantam Books, 1966.
216 pages.

ISBN: 0553124986

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

Charlie Gordon, who has an IQ below 70, participates in an experiment that gives him above average intelligence. Recorded as a diary, Charlie's progression is revealed through his initial poor writing skills and his later sophisticated language abilities.

The novel focuses on man's inhumanity to man. Charlie is seen by his co-workers as a source of humour, but as he progresses intellectually, he is shunned by these same people. The novel criticizes science for pursuing knowledge without considering moral implications, and suggests that the intellectual side of human nature needs to be balanced with compassion and love. Charlie's progression from his childlike state of innocence to his intellectual–social maturity prompts the reader to question society and its motives.

Class discussion should include the idea that loneliness and the inability to communicate occur at both ends of the intellectual spectrum. The novel may promote an interesting study of acceptance and understanding.

FORBIDDEN CITY

William Bell
1945–

Alex Jackson, the 17-year-old son of a CBC news cameraman, is with his father on assignment in China's capital, Beijing. As Alex relishes the excitement and adventures of his new residence, he reveals to the reader the events leading up to the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 and the forces controlling the lives of the Chinese people.

The events are told through personal accounts in Alex's diary. His sojourns into a tranquil city, his zest to understand the language and the people, and his encounter with the university students are suddenly transformed into a battlefield. Government forces are horridly depicted as opposing unarmed citizens, whose goal is simply to seek an audience with those in authority.

The novel provides us with an outsider's view of conditions within China. As the opposing forces clash, Alex is shot and seeks refuge in strange surroundings. As a student sympathizer, he is now the one who is being entrusted with the responsibility to capture the scenes of injustice and present the truth to the outside world. What began as an adventure now becomes a mission.

This is a thought-provoking novel that lends itself to discussion about changing political and social order in the world.

Toronto, ON:
General Paperbacks,
1991.
[original 1990]
198 pages.

ISBN: 0773673148

THE HITCH HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

Douglas Adams
1952–

London, England:
Pan Books Ltd., 1979.
159 pages.

ISBN: 0330258648

Arthur Dent, resident of a perfectly uneventful British town, is rescued by Ford Prefect, editor of the electronic book, *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, just as Earth is blasted apart by Vogons. In a classic episodic science fiction novel, made up of equal parts of adventure and humour, Arthur hitch hikes through space in a quest for the meaning of life, the Universe, and everything! A nontraditional female character provides added zest to the unexpected, fast-paced happenings.

This somewhat irreverent approach to the creation of the Universe and humankind is essentially British in approach and language. It uses both subtle and slapstick humour to parody revolution, racism, government, politics, religion, and even literature. Mature students, working individually or in small groups, should have ample opportunity to critically examine popular opinions and a variety of ideologies during this novel study.

OF MICE AND MEN

John Steinbeck
1902–1968

Steinbeck tells the story of two ironically-named drifters, George Milton and Lennie Small, who arrive at a California ranch during the Depression. Not realizing his own strength or size, the intellectually disabled Lennie has, in the past, accidentally killed his pet mice, and eventually he kills his boss' daughter-in-law. George, who has lovingly cared for and looked after Lennie, realizes that this death has killed his dream of acquiring his own ranch, and that he must find Lennie before the ranch hands do. George does find Lennie first and realizes that he must kill his friend as an act of love, in order to remove him from further suffering.

"A guy needs somebody—to be near him. A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody . . . I tell ya a guy gets too lonely an' he gets sick." These words, spoken by Crooks, a black ranch hand, identify the theme. The style of the novel is simple—the words are mainly monosyllabic, suggesting the nature of the people Steinbeck is describing. The sentence structure is often rhythmic, poetic, portraying sometimes a mood of peace and tranquility, and sometimes one of violence. The simplicity of the setting lends itself to a discussion of unity, symbol and theme.

In the classroom, it is important to reflect on the social considerations of alienation, desire, love, dignity and commitment. Some of the characters use profane language, but this punctuates the emotions that have been stirred up and reflects the attitudes found in the lives and circumstances of American workers at that time.

New York, NY:
Bantam Books, 1972.
[original 1937]
118 pages.

ISBN: 0553131001

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

RIGHT CHURCH, WRONG PEW

Walter Stewart
1931–

Toronto, ON:
McClelland & Stewart Inc.,
1991.
[original 1990]
213 pages.

ISBN: 0771083017

On his doorstep one summer morning, Carlton Withers, a small-town bachelor reporter, finds the body of the man accused of killing his parents. As the most likely murder suspect, Carlton is eyed with suspicion by his neighbours, employer, friends, and his new female photographer partner. He is relieved when his best friend, a retired detective, takes on the case in this humorous, romantic and intriguing mystery.

Some slightly sexist comments in the novel accurately reflect the characters and only provide fuel for the photographer partner, a feisty, intelligent female protagonist, who eventually solves the murders. Students should enjoy the humour, plot development, character study and the sardonic look at small-town life.

THE RUNNER

Cynthia Voigt
1942–

In a small rural community in North Carolina, Bullet, a young man from a dysfunctional family, struggles to maintain his self-worth by becoming a top, cross-country runner. His father is overly restrictive, his siblings have run away from home, and his mother acquiesces to whatever his father wishes. In this loveless existence, Bullet retains his sanity through stoicism, self-discipline and exercise. His relationship with a black runner allows Bullet to deal with his own racial prejudice and stereotyping. It is untimely that the Vietnam war ends Bullet's struggle to escape from his father's domination.

The story accurately reflects the racist language and social climate and attitudes of the times, focusing on the racial tension in the United States of the 1960s, the integration/segregation issue, and the Vietnam war. Through full class, small group, or individual study, students should appreciate how the author skillfully illustrates breaking down barriers through communication and understanding.

New York, NY:
Fawcett Juniper, 1986.
First Ballantine Books edition.
[original 1985]
217 pages.

ISBN: 0449702944

SHOELESS JOE

W. P. Kinsella
1935–

New York, NY:
Ballantine Books, 1983.
First Ballantine Books edition.
[original 1982]
224 pages.

ISBN: 0345342569

Ray Kinsella, a small time farmer with a mission, dreams that he is destined to build a baseball stadium to which his hero, Shoeless Joe Jackson, will come to play ball. Ray begins his quest, makes a baseball field, brings J. D. Salinger to his farm, and watches as the ghosts of great players from the 1920s arrive to replay timeless games. Ray's conversations with the spirits of past baseball heroes are nostalgic and unusual, as the ghosts are able to right the wrongs of the past. Ray dreams of correcting errors from the past, and thereby achieving self-fulfillment.

An interesting blend of fantasy and history, this well-crafted novel allows students the opportunity to reflect on the power of dreams and on the possibility of attaining them. The many allusions and interesting characterizations may be best suited to small group or individual study.

A THIEF OF TIME

Tony Hillerman
1925–

When noted anthropologist, Dr. Eleanor Freidman-Bernal, walks into a moonlit canyon of Anasazi pictographs she hears the flute sounds of Kokopelli, the "Humpbacked Flute Player" god of those vanished, ancient people. That night, the Anasazi are not the only missing people. Dr. Freidman-Bernal herself vanishes, which brings Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn and Officer Jim Chee of the Navajo Tribal Police onto the scene to investigate her disappearance. When two bodies later appear amid bones at an ancient burial site, Leaphorn and Chee must rely on their own knowledge of history, archeology, religion and the "Navajo way" to solve the murders and find the missing Eleanor.

The protagonists, Leaphorn and Chee, are strong, well-developed characters who do not fall into the category of stock or stereotype "Natives". They exhibit the full range of human emotions and provide much for the study of character development in this novel.

This is a detective novel that blends strong characterization with a riveting plot to create empathy and respect for the Navajo people and their complex culture. Hillerman takes great care in creating, with precise details, the intricacies and nuances of Navajo social and family structures, and their religion.

New York, NY:
Harper & Row Publishers,
Inc., 1990.
[original 1988]
334 pages.

ISBN: 0061000043

ADRIFT: SEVENTY-SIX DAYS LOST AT SEA

Steven Callahan
1952–

New York, NY:
Ballantine Books, 1987.
First Ballantine Books edition.
[original 1986]
344 pages.

ISBN: 0345340833

Steven Callahan, sailing solo across the Atlantic, is left with only a life raft, knife, emergency kit, small sail, and a sleeping bag when his sloop sinks. For 76 days, his ingenuity and resourcefulness keep him alive in his small life raft, Rubber Ducky III. He survives on raw fish, tiny amounts of painstakingly collected water and anything even remotely edible. He expresses clearly the emotional roller coaster of hope and despair as he is at the mercy of the weather, the sea, sharks and large fish during his lengthy ordeal. Emaciated and covered in sores, he lands in Guadeloupe, having saved his own life with his initiative, skill and endurance.

This is a survival story that should especially appeal to male students, and to students who are able to emphathize with Callahan. Diagrams and illustrations allow the reader to visualize the hardships endured by the author.

GIFTED HANDS

Ben Carson, M.D., with Cecil Murphey
19[?] – 19[?] –

Abandoned by his father, son of a single, uneducated mother, black and growing up in the tenements of Boston, Ben Carson is an unlikely candidate to become a leading neurosurgeon. Yet, he overcomes disadvantages, such as prejudice and peer pressure, to succeed. His ability to work hard and laugh, and his belief in God, permeates his story.

This easy-to-read biography offers the example of a positive role model who overcomes much adversity with the support and encouragement of adults. The narrative enhances the reader's views of blacks and single mothers.

Ben Carson's story proves that one can achieve goals with dedication and discipline. Students could discuss or write about how they or their families have overcome adversity in their lives.

New York, NY:
HarperCollins Publishers,
1993.
[original 1990]
232 pages.

ISBN: 0061042536

RYAN WHITE: MY OWN STORY

Ryan White and Ann Marie Cunningham
1971–1990 19[?] –

New York, NY:
Signet, 1992.
[original 1991]
326 pages.

ISBN: 0451173228

Ryan White, a hemophiliac, is determined to live a normal life. However, at age 13, he is diagnosed with AIDS as a result of receiving contaminated blood while being treated for hemophilia. Ryan recounts his experiences with being shunned by friends, barred from attending school, the legal battle to return to school, and having to move to another community. Before his death, at age 16, Ryan was befriended by a number of celebrities who helped publicize his difficulties and the plight of many AIDS patients.

Biographies of teenagers are rare, and Ryan's widely publicized fight for fair treatment should interest many students. His ability to cope with a life-threatening and socially unacceptable disease is a strength of the book.

Teachers should be prepared to discuss frankly the issue of AIDS, if this nonfiction work is selected. The candid discussion of discrimination faced by Ryan and his family offers many possibilities for comment on an important social issue.

SOMETHING FOR JOEY

Richard E. Peck
1934–

Joey Cappelletti was a victim of leukemia. This story tells of himself and his brother John, their mutual love and support, and their struggle to overcome life's hurdles.

John was a football halfback at Pennsylvania State University. Joey was a feisty 8-year-old who idolized his older brother. When Joey was diagnosed with leukemia, his parents put him on an experimental treatment program. An attack of chicken pox put him into a coma. With constant stimulation from family members, Joey slowly revived from his unconscious state. Meanwhile, John's popularity and skill grew with each football game.

Peck skillfully draws the parallel between Joey's fight to overcome his infirmity and John's struggle to reach professional standards in football. Joey is able to travel to New York to watch his brother win the Heisman Trophy. An emotional climax is reached when John presents the trophy to his ailing brother.

The author writes in an easy-flowing, conversational manner, showing the Cappelletti family's strength and love for one another during a time of crisis. This story provides an opportunity to look at the family unit—its strengths and its weaknesses. Students who have experienced a death in the family, or know someone who suffers from a life-threatening illness, may need support during the discussion of this book.

New York, NY:
Bantam Books, Inc.,
1978.
184 pages.

ISBN: 0553142259

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

TISHA: THE STORY OF A YOUNG TEACHER IN THE ALASKA WILDERNESS

Robert Specht
1928–

Toronto, ON:
Bantam Books, 1977.
[original 1976]
342 pages.

ISBN: 0553145622

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

In 1927, Anne Hobbs, a 19-year-old school teacher from Colorado, moves to the isolated gold mining community of Chicken, Alaska. There she finds herself the centre of interest and curiosity.

Few of her nine pupils, from Grade 1 to Grade 8, have formal schooling or knowledge of the outside world. In the beginning, she pleases students and parents alike. She gains her nickname, Tisha, from one young student who couldn't say "teacher". However, as time passes, community animosity grows toward Anne as a result of her adoption of two Native children, and her romantic relationship with a young male Métis.

Based on a true story, Specht constructs a realistic scenario, using techniques of fictional writing, emphasizing action and character conflict. This biography introduces some controversial issues concerning the cultural differences amongst the inhabitants of Chicken. Teachers should be aware that this book may evoke discussion concerning racism, stereotyping and isolation.

THE BEAN TREES

Barbara Kingsolver
1955–

New York, NY:
HarperPerennial, 1992.
[original 1988]
232 pages.

ISBN: 0060915544

Taylor Greer escapes rural Kentucky in a dilapidated '55 Volkswagen. She arrives in Tucson, Arizona at an auto repair shop called "Jesus Is Lord Used Tires," which also doubles as a sanctuary for Central American refugees. En route, she is persuaded to take responsibility for a 3-year-old Native American child whom she names Turtle. Together, they become an unlikely family, bonded by love and optimism, helping others and being helped, as they make their way through life.

Thematically, the book is warm and rich, loving and wise. Trauma is counterbalanced by genuine humanity, and violence is tempered by the warmth of human relationships. Stylistically, the narration is casual and relaxed, but the novel does contain some coarse language and controversial religious references that may be offensive to some readers. The characters are driven by understandable human motives in such a way that they, and the reader, can laugh in spite of some of life's tragedies and injustices.

Although the author deals with the trauma of child sexual abuse, and the distress that comes of abandonment and poverty, these issues are relevant to the plot and consistent with the characterization and development of theme. Teachers may also want to address the issue of inter-racial adoption. The wisdom of the book is simple and clearly drawn. It encourages the reader to acknowledge the power of unexpected alliances and resources.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Fedor Dostoevsky
1821–1881

Crime and Punishment is the story of a murder committed on the principle of the superman who places himself above society. In an effort to prove he is intellectually and morally superior to Russian society, Rodion Raskolinikov brutally murders a pawnbroker and her innocent sister with an axe. The novel traces the psychological breakdown that leads to Raskolinikov's eventual confession and sentence to a Siberian prison.

This classic is a study of the complexities of human psychology. It examines the processes that lead an individual to break under the pressure of a flawed philosophy. Dostoevsky's sinister portrait of life in 19th-century St. Petersburg, with its gloomy tenements and rampant drunkenness, contributes to Raskolinikov's psychological breakdown and adds to the debate of nature versus nurture.

This is a lengthy, complex novel that provides insights into psychology and the nature of human suffering and redemption. It is best suited for an advanced English 30 class.

Oxford, England:
Oxford University Press,
1980.
The World's Classics
edition.
Translated from the
Russian by Jessie
Coulson.
[original 1866]
527 pages.

ISBN: 0192815490

DAVITA'S HARP

Chaim Potok
1929–

New York, NY:
Fawcett Crest, 1986.
First Ballantine Books edition.
[original 1985]
438 pages.

ISBN: 0449207757

Ilanna Davita Chandel is the daughter of David and Channah Chandel. Her father is a nonbelieving Christian, her mother a nonbelieving Jew, and both are Communists. Davita's story begins in pre-World War II Brooklyn, where her parents are workers for the communist cause. Her world is anything but normal. Because of their views, her parents are forced to move from one apartment to another, and their home is always alive with meetings promoting communism. The family is thrown into turmoil when Davita's father is tragically killed in Guernica, Spain while covering the Spanish Civil War as a reporter. Furthermore, when Stalin signs the nonaggression pact with Hitler, Davita's mother becomes disillusioned with communism, which exacerbates her crisis of faith. However, this crisis eventually brings Channah and Davita closer to one another and eventually leads them both back to the mother's Jewish roots.

Students may require extensive background information on the differences between Christianity and Judaism, the Spanish Civil War, and pre-World War II America and Europe. There is one mention of a rape, a scene of sexuality, some violence and a description of a lynching. However, none is gratuitous; each incident helps to shape Davita's character.

Davita and Channah are strong female protagonists who defy or overcome many of the conventions and traditions placed before them. *Davita's Harp* is a poignant coming-of-age story that may be most appropriate for the mature reader in small group or individual study, or offered on an optional basis.

A FAREWELL TO ARMS

Ernest Hemingway
1899–1961

During World War I, Lieutenant Henry, an American ambulance driver on the Italian front, meets and falls in love with a beautiful English nurse, Catherine Barkley. The intensity of their love is juxtaposed with descriptions of soldiers demoralized by war. It is a story of love amidst a world of chaos, where love and pain co-exist, yet move toward a fatalism that is felt by Henry and Catherine.

War is not glorified, and the soldiers speak with characteristic earthiness and irreverence. Students should be reminded that the novel is set in the trenches of the Italian countryside and stereotyping of women was common at that time. After Hemingway's description of the German attack on Corpetto, a better understanding of the grim realities of a soldier's world is revealed.

Considered to be one of Hemingway's finest novels, *A Farewell to Arms* is focused on the pointlessness of war and is a lyrical novel of great power. It is an intense masculine portrayal of the effects of war, and reveals an attitude and a literary method characterized by Hemingway in the 1930s. The use of rich language and detailed description should be of interest to students, and the contrasting actions of loyalty and desertion should provoke discussion and emphasize the futility and horrors of war. The novel is appropriate for small group discussion and is best suited to the mature reader.

New York, NY:
Collier Books, 1986.
First Scribner Classic edition.
[original 1929]
332 pages.

ISBN: 0020519001

THE GRAPES OF WRATH

John Steinbeck
1902–1968

New York, NY:
Penguin Books, 1976.
[original 1939]
502 pages.

ISBN: 0140042393

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

This novel traces the journey of the Joad family in the mid-1930s from a dried-out Oklahoma tenant farm to the "Promised Land" of California, where they desperately struggle to make a living picking fruit. In spite of the efforts of Ma Joad to keep the family together, the hardships encountered—hunger, sickness, discrimination, exploitation, death—all take their toll.

The Joads are one fictional family intended to represent the thousands who followed the same route and encountered similar problems. Steinbeck, himself, travelled with these migrants in 1937 and published newspaper articles and documentary evidence of their plight. *The Grapes of Wrath* is a social novel, a vivid protest against the victimization of workers in a time of crisis; yet, despite the grim story line, it is not pessimistic in tone, but rather celebrates the beauty and triumph of the human spirit.

The novel is useful for a variety of teaching purposes: social criticism; in conjunction with parallel Canadian literature about the 1930s; for close study of varied novel techniques, such as the use of interchapters; and for Biblical parallels and symbolism. It lends itself well to small group work, to background research, to the comparison of fiction to documentary, or art to propaganda.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Charles Dickens
1812–1870

Philip Pirrip, called Pip, is an orphaned village boy who, through a series of mysterious events, finds himself with "great expectations" of becoming a "gentleman." His new-found good fortune takes him to London and elevates his social class, but does nothing to improve his character. The startling discovery of the real source of his fortune, and the eventual recognition of the needs of others, finally shows him the true meaning of "gentleman." By the end of the novel, Pip has become one, in the real sense.

The book could be useful in the study of the novel: structure, character development, point of view, setting, symbolism, style. It relates well to other fiction on the theme of innocence and growth through experience.

Great Expectations is considered by many to be Dickens' greatest literary achievement. It contains the usual Dickensian variety of characters, humour, pathos, mystery, plot complications and suspense. Thus, it sustains reader interest over its considerable length, though it should probably be chosen for the more skilled reader.

New York, NY:
Bantam Classic Press,
1958.
[original 1861]
546 pages.

ISBN: 0553210157

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

THE METAMORPHOSIS

Franz Kafka
1883–1924

New York, NY:
Bantam Books, 1986.
Translated from the
German by Stanley
Corngold.
[original 1915]
201 pages.

ISBN: 0553213695

Gregor Samsa awakens one morning to find himself transformed into a monstrous insect. He has become a "filthy stinking vermin", and is increasingly rejected and ignored by his family and all other persons who encounter him. Confined to his room, excluded from any human relationships, Samsa deteriorates, messily disintegrates, and dies.

The story is often read allegorically: as a depiction of alienation; as a religious parable dealing with the loss of faith; as an indirect version of a psychoanalytical case study of delusion and despair. Biographical comparisons can also be made to Kafka's own circumstances as an Austrian Jew.

The text of *The Metamorphosis* is short, only 58 pages. However, included in this edition is an introduction by the editor/translator, explanatory notes, material by and about Kafka, and a lengthy selection of critical material (much of which may be too specialized for all but advanced students). A selected bibliography is also appended.

Some students may have difficulty accepting the initial, unusual premise. Once it is accepted, however, readers can respond to the story's clarity and its careful use of descriptive detail. Then, various interpretations can be developed, interpretations that need not be either allegorical or biographical.

This work is best suited for advanced students.

MIZZLY FITCH: THE LIGHT, THE SEA, THE STORM

Murray Pura
1954–

Toronto, ON:
Simon & Pierre Publishing
Company Limited, 1988.
135 pages.

ISBN: 0889242011

Mizzly Fitch, as the sound of his name suggests, has led a miserable existence. As a young man in Nova Scotia he wants to be a fisherman, but his mother wants him to be a minister. He struggles with his feelings about God and about what he sees around him—the sea and the many deaths it causes. He feels cursed for surviving, for helplessly watching while his father and brothers die. The deaths cause his mother to reject him. For years he lives alone as a lighthouse keeper. Eventually, Mizzly marries, but he drives his wife away, afraid that she and their son will be cursed too and taken by the sea. She leaves, but does not take their son, the symbol of their love.

The first person narration by a protagonist, who blames God for the deaths of his family and others, causes serious reflection about life and about how people endure tragedy and maintain their faith. Significant potential exists for discussion of the meaning of life and of the relationship between challenging events in life and one's belief in God.

Teachers should be sensitive to the religious values of their students and community, which may not coincide with those of Mizzly. The conflict between Mizzly and his mother over differing dreams and expectations are experiences familiar to many high school students. The book contains some violence and strong language, and may be most appropriate for small group or individual study.

This is an unusual, fascinating story rooted in the harsh lifestyle of East Coast fishermen. The dialect requires some adjustment on the part of the reader, but the oral style makes the novel accessible. Many issues raised in the novel encourage critical thinking.

MONSIGNOR QUIXOTE

Graham Greene
1904–1991

Markham, ON:
Penguin Books Canada
Limited, 1983.
[original 1982]
256 pages.

ISBN: 0140065970

Here is an engaging dialogue between two old friends who are travelling the countryside together. The novel affords the reader the opportunity to explore two apparently diverse points of view, but these marked differences between the characters mask profoundly similar hearts. Father Quixote and his Sancho Panza, an unseated communist mayor, are two innocents abroad in modern Spain, embarked on a journey that humorously, but philosophically, parallels Cervantes' 17th-century story of Don Quixote.

Despite different political, religious, economical, even sexual perspectives, the priest and the mayor are bound together by generosity of spirit, appreciation of creation and a longing for truth. Their friendship and their growth allow the reader to uncover the enigmatic elements of human goodness and moral responsibility to society. Their journey provides background for witty conversation and allows the reader to explore how differences of opinion can lead to strong bonds of friendship. The book is a commentary on the moral person as well as the moral citizen.

Readers should not be put off by the seemingly irreverent treatment of Christianity and the Roman Catholic church. While it may appear that Greene is delving into profound theological issues, he is really dealing with basic human struggles common to all denominations, and is simply using Catholic theology and socialism as the symbolic language of the novel.

In order to understand the difficult references and allusions in this novel, the reader needs to acquire a substantial knowledge of Christianity, Marxism, communism and the Roman Catholic church. It is also recommended that students be aware of tone and theme in the writing styles of both Cervantes and Graham Greene. Time, maturity and critical thinking skills should lead to an understanding of *Monsignor Quixote* on a symbolic level. The novel may be most appropriate for mature English 30 students, or offered on an optional basis.

THE MOSQUITO COAST

Paul Theroux
1941–

New York, NY:
Avon Books, 1983.
[original 1982]
374 pages.

ISBN: 0380619458

Allie Fox packs up his family and escapes the capitalist world of America for the Mosquito Coast. An eccentric misfit in the United States, he transfers his inventive way of life to his new world. Allie believes that "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic," and therein lies the motivation for his personal pilgrimage and his attempts to overpower others. Theroux interweaves the physical and metaphorical details of the deliverance of this family in such a way as to engage the reader in their isolation and turmoil.

Allie is abusive but spellbinding in his eccentricity. The narrator, his son Charlie, is one of his victims, and yet Charlie's experiences are also his adventures. Although exploited by his father, Charlie's confusions are both understandable and compelling. The book is a powerful social satire because the control exercised by the self-centred Allie Fox parallels the rapid industrialization of the western world. He leads himself to self-destruction, taking with him those he loves. The novel can be a vehicle for an exploration of many issues in our technological and capitalistic society. Because religious references may be controversial in some communities, and the treatment of theme and character are earthy and sometimes vulgar, the novel may be most appropriate for mature English 30 students, or offered on an optional basis.

This is a story of desperation and the breakdown of individuals and society. The characters are trapped by Allie's magnetic personality, as well as by their own motivations. Their emotions move in manic-depressive swings: hope to despair, love to hate, quest to resignation. Allie's family is forced to live with his genius and his dysfunction. They are interesting in terms of their growing sense of discernment and evaluation, as well as the capacity that each has to change the course of events in her or his own life.

THE OUTSIDER

Albert Camus
1913–1960

London, England:
Penguin Books, 1983.
Translated from the
French by Joseph Laredo.
[original 1942]
119 pages.

ISBN: 0140180184

This novel was first published in French in 1942 as *L'Étranger*. Meursault, a young man in the French colony of Algiers, tells the story of the last year of his life. With almost equal emphasis—or lack of it—he describes his mother's funeral, a casual affair with a woman, his acquaintance with a neighbour and his dog, a day at the beach, his killing of an Arab under the hot sun, his trial and conviction, and his last thoughts in prison before his execution.

The simple, frank and unemotional narration reflects a man who refuses to "play the game": to pretend more than he feels, to lie, to judge himself or others. He is, therefore, seen as a threat to a conventional colonial society, to the legal system, and to the Christian church. As a result, he is condemned to death as much for his refusal to conform as for his killing of the Arab. Meursault is an example of what Camus calls "the Absurd Hero," one who finds himself a stranger in an indifferent universe, and who does not require explanation of or justification for his existence, but rather, accepts the simple fact of life itself.

The novel is short and deceptively simple in narration. Its unconventional protagonist, unexpected development and strangely flat style attracts the interest of students and stimulates thoughtful discussion and evaluation of the existential view of life. It is also useful in the study of novel techniques: structure, style, character development, and social and metaphysical themes.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Jane Austen
1775–1817

> "It is truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."

This opening statement from *Pride and Prejudice* neatly combines the typical Austen subject matter, the search for a suitable marriage partner, with the ironic tone of the novel.

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet of Longbourne, Hertfordshire, with an estate entailed on a fatuous male cousin, have five unmarried daughters, and so the quest for wealthy husbands for at least the two oldest daughters is a serious matter. The arrival in the neighbourhood of an eligible young bachelor, Mr. Bingley, sets all the mothers atwitter and scheming. The eldest and most beautiful Bennet daughter, Jane, seems a perfect choice for Bingley, but the plot of the novel centres on her sister, the lively and opinionated Elizabeth, and Bingley's supercilious and aristocratic friend, Darcy. Pride and prejudice—on both sides—complicate the plot.

This classic novel is probably the best known, and most popular, of the Austen canon. It can be read not only for its story but studied for its fictional techniques, especially the development of character by speech and gesture, and a subtly controlled ironic style. This edition contains a substantial introduction, a select bibliography, Austen's chronology and some explanatory notes.

Oxford, England:
Oxford University
Press, 1990.
The World's Classics
edition.
[original 1813]
351 pages.

ISBN: 019282760X

SAINT MAYBE

Anne Tyler
1941–

Toronto, ON:
Penguin Books Canada
Ltd., 1992.
[original 1991]
363 pages.

ISBN: 0140159592

Baltimore, Maryland is the home of the ideal, "all-American" family, the Bedloes. However, this idyllic world is soon shattered when Ian, the youngest child, learns a secret that has tragic consequences for Dan, his older brother. This tragedy alters Ian, sending him on a lifelong and painful search for redemption. His journey begins at "The Church of the Second Chance" whose theology expounds that forgiveness is not given freely, but must be earned. After years of arduous labour, Ian finally gains his redemption when he meets Rita, marries her, and they have a child.

In typical Tyler fashion, the characters in *Saint Maybe* are quirky and off-beat, yet are easily understood and accepted by the reader. Some characters, however, are presented as stock figures. For example, the Bedloes have a series of "Middle Eastern" neighbours, university students, who are never named, and are portrayed as people who never seem to adapt to "Western standards," yet become part of the Bedloes' extended family. Students could examine whether or not Tyler does this to ridicule a particular ethnic group, or is she using satire as a way of examining society's views toward immigrants.

Tyler also uses many religious references to depict Ian's quest for forgiveness and makes his religion one of the focal points of the novel. When pre-reading, the teacher should consider possible community concerns about the ethic or religious references Tyler presents. During novel study, students should critically examine these issues as well as the references to foreigners, particularly those of Middle Eastern origin.

Overall, this is an excellent novel to use in examining character development, an individual's search for redemption, and the evolution of family.

THE STONE ANGEL

Margaret Laurence
1926–1987

This novel tells of the last few days in the life of Hagar Shipley, a proud, stubborn old woman of 90. Age has rendered her incapable of living independently, she bitterly resents the assistance she requires, and she struggles to escape from her son's home. Her tired old mind wanders into the past, calling into life, once more, the people—especially the men—who have been important to her. Her father, from whom she inherited her stubborn pride and inability to express the softer side of her nature; her husband, who died never suspecting her unspoken love; her favourite son, John, willful and unmanageable like herself, are all dead now. Only Marvin, her eldest son, is left, and when she finally forces herself to voice the approval he longs to hear, the words are a lie. Hagar dies as she has lived—proud and independent.

From a technical point of view, this novel provides good material for the study of plot structure, point of view, symbolism, characterization, and effective use of stylistic devices. Central among these devices is the stone angel, which Hagar's father has erected, ostensibly a memorial to his dead wife, but more truthfully, as a monument to his own pride and a symbol of Hagar herself.

The characters are interesting and convincing, and together they offer a realistic portrayal of human nature. The background provides a view of western Canadian life from the 1920s through to the 1960s. Student discussion of the novel could consider the extent to which Hagar is individual and idiosyncratic, or representative of elderly women of her time and place.

Toronto, ON:
McClelland & Stewart
Inc., 1968.
[original 1964]
304 pages.

ISBN: 0771091591

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

UNDER THE RIBS OF DEATH

John Marlyn
1912–

Toronto, ON:
McClelland & Stewart
Inc., 1990.
[original 1957]
263 pages.

ISBN: 0771098669

In Winnipeg during the late 1920s, a young immigrant boy struggles to become Anglicized. Although Sander is Hungarian, he could be any immigrant from anywhere, and the story follows him through poverty to success and to poverty once again. In his quest for wealth, Sander rejects his family, friends and ethics—only to regain these values, love of family, spiritual goals, and a sense of pride and dignity—when he once more finds himself indigent.

The novel reflects the social mores of the era and deals with the non-Anglo immigration experience through stereotypes of the "English" and the "foreigner." In so doing, the prejudices of English Canadians, and the effects of the Great Depression are revealed. The writing style uses examples of dour humour contrasted with expressions of despair and poverty. While there is some blasphemy, it is used to reveal the despair of the characters.

This novel provides opportunity for discussion regarding theme, point of view, irony and characterization. Sander's struggle for identity reveals the ironic need to be simultaneously independent and dependent.

THE WARS

Timothy Findley
1930–

Robert Ross, a gentle 19-year-old Canadian, experiences the horrors and personal dilemmas of war as a young officer in France during World War I. He undergoes moral and physical violation, and makes personally courageous but politically treasonous decisions, which lead to court-martial. The novel is a strong and sensitive condemnation of all "wars" against the human spirit. In the midst of death, Ross is a young man committed to, and affirming of, the value of all life.

Findley is critical of organized religion and, although he doesn't emphasize it, it is clear he doubts the ability of the church to respond meaningfully in times of either public or private crisis. Robert's mother, an alcoholic who suffers terribly over Robert's involvement with the war, derives little comfort from the church. There are two explicitly sexual scenes that may need to be considered if selecting this novel. One is set in a brothel near Lethbridge where Robert observes his war hero, Captain Taffler, in a homosexual act; another is the gang-rape of Robert by his fellow officers, in the officers' dark steam bath. Both scenes, however, are essential to the development of the central character and to the themes of the novel. Because of the religious and sexual references, the book might be best offered on an optional basis.

As a novel study, *The Wars* is interesting for its unique narrative structure: the use of different points of view as collected by a contemporary researcher, through clippings, photographs, letters and interviews. Shifts in time may cause some initial reader confusion, but the purpose soon becomes clear. In spite of its serious subject matter, the novel is fast-paced, immensely readable, and written with a sure, fine touch.

Markham, ON:
Penguin Books, 1978.
[original 1977]
190 pages.

ISBN: 0140050116

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

WILD GEESE

Martha Ostenso
1900–1963

Toronto, ON:
McClelland & Stewart Inc.,
1989.
[original 1925]
309 pages.

ISBN: 0771099940

Set on a farm in Northern Manitoba, this novel portrays the life of Caleb Gare who cruelly suppresses his family. He blackmails his wife with the threat of exposing her illegitimate son, Mark Jordan, to the truth about his real father. The plot is further developed when Mark falls in love with the visiting school teacher, Lind Archer, whose confidante is Jude, Caleb's daughter. Jude's strength and sexuality are contrasted to Lind's delicacy and tenderness. Later, Jude rejects Caleb's belief in the necessity of immigrant hardships, and triumphs over her father's oppression.

The novel provides for an interesting discussion of the family farm as a backdrop for a story of passion and manipulation of power. The characters' emotions are paralleled to the conditions of the land; Caleb is "a spiritual counterpart of the land, as harsh, as demanding, as tyrannical as the very soil from which he drew his existence," and he exerts this power over his family.

The story is set in the period between the arrival of the geese in the spring and their departure in autumn, further symbolizing the natural world as representative of the characters. The novel should provide for interesting discussions on language, character development, symbolism and theme, and is appropriate for full class discussion.

WINDFLOWER

Gabrielle Roy
1909–1983

Elsa, a young Inuit girl, is seduced by an American soldier in Fort Chimo, Northwest Territories. The child who is born, Jimmy, becomes the object of his young mother's devotion. She attempts to immerse him in the Inuit culture, but finally loses him to the white man's world and his wars. *Windflower* is a translation of *La Rivière sans Repos*, one of four stories in which Roy depicts the Inuit in an uneasy transition between two worlds, not fully at home in either.

Various themes emerge: the imprisoning effect of material possessions; the brotherhood of man; the cyclic nature of life; and the brief joys of love and motherhood—symbolized by the short-lived tundra windflower.

The novel is short, easy to read, informal in style and clear in structure. It provides a sympathetic insight into the Inuit way of life, which is warmly and compellingly portrayed.

Toronto, ON:
McClelland and Stewart,
1975.
New Canadian Library
edition.
Translated from the
French by Joyce
Marshall.
[original 1970]
152 pages.

ISBN: 0771092202

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

WUTHERING HEIGHTS

Emily Brontë
1818–1848

New York, NY:
Bantam Classic Press,
1981.
[original 1847]
338 pages.

ISBN: 0686697278

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

The saga of the inhabitants of *Wuthering Heights* is narrated by a new arrival on the wild Yorkshire moors, John Lockwood, whose informant is his housekeeper, Nelly Dean. She recounts to him, in a series of vivid flashbacks and time shifts, the events making up the troubled love story of Catherine Earnshaw and the dark and passionate Heathcliff—a story of love and vengeance, which passes on to the next generation in the characters of Cathy, the dead Catherine's daughter, and Linton, Heathcliff's son.

The novel can be read as a love story, but at a deeper level, as an exploration of the darker side of human nature. Some readers may find some of the incidents, such as the strangling of a dog, or the hanging of puppies, troubling and distasteful—but they are part of the vein of undeniable cruelty that underlies the human nature portrayed.

This Brontë classic has both a poetic and a moral structure. The intensity of the characters' emotions, the wildness and remoteness of setting, and the Gothic atmosphere, make the novel fascinating and disturbing.

THE BROKEN CORD

Michael Dorris
1945–

New York, NY:
HarperPerennial, 1990.
[original 1989]
281 pages.

ISBN: 0060916826

As a young bachelor, Michael Dorris adopts a young boy, Adam. Over the course of the next 15 years, Michael gradually and painfully discovers that his adopted son is epileptic and severely limited developmentally. The challenges of physical and mental limitations strain Michael's resources, and when he marries, family relationships as well. Finally, after years of uncertainty, Adam is diagnosed as a victim of fetal alcohol syndrome, or FAS. The effects of his mother's drinking during pregnancy have been catastrophic to Adam and eventually lead to his death. Adam is unable to imagine, to foresee the consequences of his behaviour, or to remember from one time to the next the results of his actions. As Adam becomes an adult, his adopted parents are less able to protect him from himself and from others.

This account reads like a novel, though it includes scientific evidence and statistics, as well as a brief autobiography of Adam. But most of all, it shines with love and impotent fury for a life destroyed before it was ever lived. Dorris, a well-educated, articulate Native American, draws attention to FAS and its effects. This book is best suited to the mature reader and offers a sensitive yet important issue for students to discuss.

THE DAY I BECAME AN AUTODIDACT: AND THE ADVICE, ADVENTURES, AND ACRIMONIES THAT BEFELL ME THEREAFTER

Kendall Hailey
1966–

New York, NY:
Dell Publishing, 1988.
278 pages.

ISBN: 0440550130

Kendall Hailey, the daughter of Californian playwright Oliver Hailey, and novelist, Elizabeth Forsythe Hailey, records her experiences after she decides at the end of Grade 10, with family support, that "it's over between me and formal education." The book is a journal of her attempts at self-education in the form of extensive reading, some writing, and a good deal of thinking and systematic self-examination of "What I Did" and "What I Hope to Do."

This may sound pompous and possibly alienating to the non-self-starter high school student, but the writer is disarmingly frank and fresh in her approach. Students of much the same age might enjoy reading about Hailey's adolescent experiences, even if a bit daunted by the amount of reading she manages to get through. Although the allusions to the books she reads and the plays she sees may baffle some students, they may well, with teacher encouragement, whet an appetite for reading the classics.

The book might best be used in excerpts to stimulate the writing of diaries or personal response journals.

NIGHT

Elie Wiesel
1928–

New York, NY:
Bantam Books, 1982.
Translated from the
French by Stella Rodway.
[original 1958]
109 pages.

ISBN: 0553272535

Night is the terrifying account of a Nazi death camp as told by survivor Elie Wiesel. Wiesel was still a teenager when he was taken from his home in Sighet, Transylvania, to the Auschwitz concentration camps and then to Buchenwald. The horror turned this young Jewish boy into an agonized witness to the death of his family, the death of innocence and the death of his God. Even through all this, the story is one of hope and bravery. *Night* is a warning to humankind to ensure that such an atrocity never happens again.

Teachers should undertake the teaching of this novel with considerable preparation and care. The topic is, by its very nature, a sensitive one. The descriptions of violence and cruelty may be objectionable to some students and community members; however, they reinforce that the treatment of Jews in concentration camps during World War II was focused on humiliation, suffering and deprivation. Some of the scenes are particularly unnerving and depressing. Reference is made to a cultured people who were victims of genocide while the world remained silent.

Although this personal account deals with an historical event, the issues are timeless—man's inhumanity to man, the struggle to survive against all odds, and the hope that such things will never happen again.

Through a series of short, powerful, painful glimpses, its pace and style make Wiesel's story agonizing and convincing. This excellent cross-curricular book parallels studies in Social Studies 30, and could lead to related research about genocide today. The book is suitable for full class, small group or individual study.

OSCAR PETERSON: THE WILL TO SWING

Gene Lees
1928–

Oscar Peterson, a young black man from Montreal, became an internationally known musician while still in his 20s. In this biography, Gene Lees examines the challenges and struggles that Peterson faced as he worked to become one of the world's greatest jazz pianists.

Peterson is characterized as a positive role model. He works hard, he actively fights to combat racism, and he exemplifies those who lack economic advantages and still succeed. However, some students may be offended by the coarse language and examples of racial discrimination and prejudice that appear in this work, and should critically examine these instances as well as the negative behaviours of some of the individuals presented. The book promotes the idea that people of all racial/ethnic groups can achieve and interact positively.

The content of the book should be interesting to those students with musical interests and would be most appropriate for either small group or individual study.

Toronto, ON:
Lester & Orpen Dennys
Limited, 1988.
282 pages.

ISBN: 0886191297

PILGRIM AT TINKER CREEK

Annie Dillard
1945–

New York, NY:
HarperPerennial, 1985.
[original 1974]
271 pages.

ISBN: 0060915455

Annie Dillard says of herself, "I am above all an unscrupulous observer." *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* is a season-by-season series of her personal observations of nature. They centre on a poet and naturalist's "receptiveness and concentration" on the countryside around Tinker Creek, Virginia and range from minute observations of such phenomena as caddis fly larvae to speculations about the principle of indeterminacy, or Einstein's "holy curiosity" about the nature of the Universe.

There is a passing allusion to a "simple and cruel Eskimo tale" (source, Farley Mowat) which is effective in a disturbing way. This work alludes mainly to male philosophers, artists and scientists but this is counterbalanced by the overall strong and sensitive voice of the woman who is writing. Dillard's style is lucid, often witty, and personal. The writer moves calmly, and often poetically, from the concrete to the abstract, from observation to introspection. The scientific eye is balanced by a very human approach and a reverence for the dignity of all forms of life.

Since the whole work may demand more staying power than can be expected from all but the most able and determined readers, teachers might consider using excerpts from this book. Passages from it would be excellent as models for the teaching of writing and for developing "the secret of seeing," which lies behind most effective writing.

STEPHEN HAWKING: QUEST FOR A THEORY OF EVERYTHING

Kitty Ferguson
19[?] –

New York, NY:
Bantam Books, 1992.
[original 1991]
161 pages.

ISBN: 055329895X

This nonfiction book is an account of the life and work of Stephen Hawking, eminent physicist of the 20th century who is diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease) at the age of 20. His quest for truth in the world of theoretical physics becomes a triumph of the spirit and mind over extreme physical disability.

Hawking's search, discoveries and theories are discussed in relatively simple terms. Numerous clarifying diagrams are provided, as well as a glossary at the end, which will aid the reader in understanding. His quest covers the exploration and explanation for "a theory of everything," which is nothing short of an explanation of the Universe and everything that happens within it.

This biography should be of special interest to students fascinated by physics, science or science fiction. Research projects could follow, such as group studies of "people who have made a difference." Students not particularly interested in science might still become involved in the biographical material of a brilliant and courageous man. A glossary, to assist with some of the scientific terms, is included at the end of this edition.

TO DESTROY YOU IS NO LOSS: THE ODYSSEY OF A CAMBODIAN FAMILY

Joan D. Criddle and Teeda Butt Mam
1935 – 19[?] –

New York, NY:
Doubleday, 1989.
Anchor Books edition.
[original 1987]
288 pages.

ISBN: 0385266286

To Destroy You Is No Loss is a compassionate biography that tells of a Cambodian family's ordeal during the Khmer Rouge holocaust in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979. The preface gives an excellent background to the events leading up to and during the holocaust. The book, itself, traces the life of one very courageous young woman, Teeda Butt Mam, and her family during those years of servitude and genocide while Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge held the country in a death grip. Following the fall of the Pol Pot, the family become refugees and find their way to the United States. The co-author, Joan Criddle, helps sponsor the Butt family's emigration to America. She dedicates the book "To Teeda and her family for a willingness to recount painful experiences, to make their ordeal public, in order that we might understand."

Students who are concerned with the politics of the Asiatic world, who wish to study political leaders and societies, who wish to learn more about the Cambodians among us, who are interested in world refugee problems, and who are concerned with man's humanity or inhumanity to man, should be interested in this book.

A remarkable "tour de force" that demonstrates the strength of the human will to survive, this biography would fit well with Social Studies 30 or in a humanities program.

TOUCH THE EARTH: A SELF-PORTRAIT OF INDIAN EXISTENCE

T. C. McLuhan
19[?] –

New York, NY:
Simon & Schuster,
Inc., 1971.
185 pages.

ISBN: 0671222759

This book is a sepia photo-illustrated compilation of speeches and excerpts from documents, all told in the voice of the North American Indian, many of whom, like Chief Joseph, Tecumseh and Geronimo, are well-known historical figures. Their voices range in tone from the nostalgic and philosophical, to the bitter and defiant.

The material spans a century and records the Native view of the white man's betrayal of nature and of an indigenous race. Section headings indicate the range of topic and tone: "The Morning Sun, the New Sweet Earth and the Great Silence;" "The Hairy Man from the East;" "My Voice is Become Weak;" "If We Surrender, We Die." Early parts of the book reinforce the closeness of the Native to the land and provoke interest in a time of increasing concern about the environment.

The book promotes an empathy toward Native peoples and provides for increased understanding of the spiritual significance of many facets of Native life. There is, however, a marked imbalance. All Natives are perceived positively; almost all Caucasians are stereotyped negatively. While this might be seen as a restoring of the balance against the negative stereotyping of the Native in past literature and history, teachers should be aware that *Touch the Earth* is not suitable as a whole "stand-alone" resource. Its bias should be recognized and the book used only if accompanied by other material and activities, either to balance the "white view" often historically presented, or with literature that reveals some examples of Caucasians who have interacted positively with Native people. The book may be most appropriate for either small group or individual study.

The voices in this book are powerful, but students should be aware that they are not reading a balanced history, but a personal, literary and artistic view of history. The language is often lyrical and passionate and, as a sort of anthology of prose poetry, the book lends itself to oral reading of selections.

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

Erich Maria Remarque
1898–1970

New York, NY:
Fawcett Crest, 1982.
First Ballantine Books edition.
Translated from the German by A. W. Wheen.
[original 1928]
296 pages.

ISBN: 0449213943

Paul Baumer, a German schoolboy, enlists with his classmates in World War I. Although youthful and optimistic, they lose their childhood, their connection to humankind, and their lives, through years of horror. Paul tries to fight against the hate that destroys all the young people regardless of country or uniform.

Preservation of life and the overcoming of prejudices are the main themes of the novel. The destructive powers of war, both mental and physical, are depicted through the many hardships the soldiers endure. Their struggles are heroic and universal. Classroom discussions can be enriched by the realization that people everywhere are similar, no matter what war they are fighting or cause they are defending.

As in all war stories, there is profanity, violence, sexuality and stereotyping, all necessary for the framework of the novel's setting. War is violent and destructive, and these young boys initially respond in a similar manner, but they also mature, realizing the senselessness of violence and death, and become aware of the need for greater tolerance and understanding in the world.

This novel relates well to the social studies curriculum and is appropriate for full class study.

THE CHOSEN

Chaim Potok
1929–

The Chosen is a story of friendship which develops when two Jewish boys are rivals during a baseball game. Reuven Malter is an Orthodox Jew; Danny Saunders is a Hasidic Jew and oldest son of his sect's rebbi. In spite of their religious differences, the two develop a strong bond of love and friendship that is able to survive all adversity. The story not only revolves around their friendship, but also examines the difficulties faced when the desires of a child do not match the desires that parents and culture place on the individual. A central question of the novel is: Should the individual sacrifice personal desires to the aspirations of the community?

Students may require extensive background information on the differences between Orthodox and Hasidic Jews. Furthermore, students need to understand that the Hasidic Jews do not represent the mainstream of Jewish thought and belief.

This is an excellent novel for the study of character and how society helps define who and what an individual is. It is a complex novel best suited to an advanced English 33 class.

New York, NY:
Fawcett Crest, 1982.
First Ballantine Books edition.
[original 1967]
271 pages.

ISBN: 0449213447

FAHRENHEIT 451

Ray Bradbury
1920–

New York, NY:
Ballantine Books, 1981.
[original 1953]
167 pages.

ISBN: 0345294661

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

In this speculative fiction work, the state controls all thinking. The general theme is that "Books are bad. Books are burned because books are ideas." The protagonist, Guy Montag, is a fireman whose job is to burn books. Complications arise in Montag's professional and personal life when, out of curiosity, he steals a book from a burning library and is subsequently denounced by his wife and workmates. He escapes to a faraway land where books are preserved in an amazing manner.

The ideology of state-controlled communication, as outlined by Montag's fire chief, Beatty, is closer to today's reality; e.g., information highways, than it was at the time Bradbury wrote the novel. The author equates freedom with the expansion of ideas through reading, writing and conversation.

The novel is an excellent example of social satire and should generate lively discussions by technologically astute students. Although the style is fairly simple, and the plot easily followed, the emphasis is on character study and the idea of individual choice.

FALLEN ANGELS

Walter Dean Myers
1937–

Perry, a 17-year-old black youth, has no future in Harlem, and so enlists in the army to fight in the Vietnam war. He and his friend, Peewee, survive physically, but not before the horrors of war and the deaths of men, women and children embed themselves in their psyches. Disillusioned, Perry must find meaning in life. Realistic, harsh language reflects the violence and killing that is constantly questioned throughout the plot. The novel leads to philosophical reflections on war, as young soldiers yearn for the child within.

Overcoming ethnic differences, political biases, religious beliefs, interpersonal relationships and racial hatreds are all components of the novel. However, concerns may arise when dealing with this well-written, compassionate novel. Teachers should be prepared for the controversial discussions and responses that this work may engender. Sensitivity to Vietnamese students in the classroom, school or community is strongly recommended.

This is a powerful and moving novel. The composition, tempo, craft and rhythm are well-tuned and ring true. Although engrossing, fascinating and violently graphic, the male characters display blasphemy, prejudice, discrimination, sexism, despair and violent reactions within a war setting. This novel may be most appropriate for small group or individual study, or offered on an optional basis.

New York, NY:
Scholastic Inc., 1988.
309 pages.

ISBN: 0590409433

JURASSIC PARK

Michael Crichton
1942-

New York, NY:
Ballantine Books, 1991.
[original 1990]
399 pages.

ISBN: 0345370775

Dr. Allan Grant and Dr. Ellie Sattler join other consultants and guests at a dinosaur theme island off the coast of Costa Rica. Dinosaurs have been cloned from Jurassic-era DNA, combined with more recent DNA from frogs. The resulting offspring develop overly aggressive characteristics leading to lots of excitement, adventure and violence, in which all the bad guys die, and all the good guys survive.

Although somewhat gruesome and violent, this futuristic novel should encourage extensive discussion on philosophical ideals, the implications of genetic and scientific research, the ethics of reproductive technology, dinosaurs, and ecosystems. These topics lend themselves to cross-curricular research, discussion or projects. The "Malcolm theory," named after one of the novel's scientists, provides a focus for moral and ethical discussions and observations. Either full class or small group study should elicit strong personal responses to this work.

KING RAT

James Clavell
1925–

King Rat depicts the life of British and American personnel in a Japanese prisoner of war camp. The key figure in the novel is "the King," an American corporal who manages to retain a standard of living envied by all other PoWs. The King is surrounded by countless underlings who both support and betray him. He has one friend, British Flight Lieutenant Peter Marlowe. The King's "greatest enemy" is L. Gary, Provost Marshall, a lonely fanatic who is determined to entrap him.

Clavell carefully describes the highly structured nature of a PoW camp and the British concern with "class." These descriptions parallel one another and are used to advantage to reveal the individuals who manipulate the system. The incidents that make up the story help to develop the idea that survival requires adaptation.

Some of the characters use colloquial language that may, at times, be considered offensive. However, the setting is a prisoner of war camp, and the language used realistically reflects these circumstances. The transvestite Clavell writes about is sympathetically portrayed. Women, as in most war stories, are presented in traditional and subservient roles. This novel may be most appropriate for mature readers in small group or individual study.

New York, NY:
Dell Publishing, 1982.
[original 1962]
352 pages.

ISBN: 0440145465

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

LETTERS FROM WINGFIELD FARM

Dan Needles
19[?] –

Toronto, ON:
Seal Books, 1990.
[original 1989]
150 pages.

ISBN: 0770423868

Walt Wingfield leaves his position as board chairman of a Toronto brokerage house to take over the "old Fisher place" on Rural Route 1, Persephone County. He begins to farm his newly acquired 100-acre plot as a philosopher-farmer. He believes he can establish an economically viable operation based on sound, big business principles, while using only horse-drawn equipment.

In his attempt to become one with the land, Walt encounters many of the well-established locals. Two neighbours in particular, a dour, inarticulate auctioneer, and an old horse trainer, provide colourful characterization in vignettes about Walt's mishaps as a farmer.

Wingfield's Pyrrhic victories are chronicled with wit in the form of letters to the editor of the local newspaper. By the end of the novel, Walt's letters reflect a respect and appreciation for his new life and friends, and reveal his emerging self-awareness. Although humorous, Walt's growth is no less important or evocative.

The letter format of this novel can provide students with a refreshing approach to journal writing. The main character laughs at himself and his mishaps, and invites the reader to do the same. Rich in irony, understatement and dramatic pacing, the work is valuable as a study of dramatic character presentation and the vignette format.

MEDICINE RIVER

Thomas King
1943–

Thomas King has created a tongue-in-cheek account of the inhabitants and the social structure of Medicine River. The protagonist, Will, returns to a small Blackfoot community in southern Alberta to sort out the details of his mother's death. This return to his roots stirs many long-buried issues from his childhood and forces him to confront his true values. His encounter with Harlen Bigbear results in a series of events which direct his life and affairs into otherwise unconsidered directions. He opens the only Native photography shop in Medicine River and agrees to compile the band directory. This project is the framework for Will's encounter with the Native population. A progression of escapades—sometimes painful, often hilarious—brings Will to an understanding of his own identity and commitments.

The characters in this novel are warm and engaging, and the story line is lighthearted without being predictable. Will's quest to understand himself is universal, in spite of his unique experiences. Life in Medicine River exposes dilemmas and contradictions that exist in many small Alberta towns.

This novel is written in a clear, forthright manner and contains enough good character dialogue and plot intrigue to hold student interest. Often, the personal stories are painful and touching, but there is an overriding sense of humour and optimism to the work, which leaves the reader with a sense of compassion for and understanding of the characters and an appreciation of Native culture.

Toronto, ON:
Penguin Books
Canada Ltd., 1991.
[original 1989]
261 pages.

ISBN: 0140126031

THE MIDWICH CUCKOOS

John Wyndham
1903–1969

Markham, ON:
Penguin Books Canada
Ltd., 1960.
[original 1957]
220 pages.

ISBN: 0140014403

In a futuristic society, the residents of a small English town are sedated by aliens for 24 hours. All the women of childbearing age become pregnant, and the resultant sets of twins are all telepathic. They eventually gain the power and knowledge to control the village inhabitants. Only through a violent, self-sacrificing climax are the aliens exterminated. In the process, human behaviour is re-evaluated.

The novel provokes readers to examine such topics as human nature, individual versus group behaviour, biological and judicial law, all of which can enhance student understanding of self and society. The author incorporates philosophies and beliefs about human behaviour, and explains how a new society might evolve.

The idea of alien intervention in evolution may be somewhat controversial; however, the novel is speculative and should be treated as such.

ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF IVAN DENISOVICH

Alexander Solzhenitsyn
1918–

Incarcerated in a Siberian camp for political prisoners, Ivan Denisovich depends upon his shrewdness and skills as a mason to survive. Solzhenitsyn introduces Ivan at 5 o'clock on a cold winter morning, and the reader follows him through a typical day. In Ivan's life, the overriding factor is self-preservation.

The novel is short and easy to read. Its apparent simplicity is deceptive. Based on Solzhenitsyn's own experiences, Ivan becomes a type of "Everyman" in a novel whose main theme is the overwhelming impulse and courage of the human spirit to survive. The book is not depressing in tone, in spite of the rigours and privations of a prison camp.

London, England:
Heinemann
Educational Books
Ltd., 1974.
New Windmill edition.
Translated from the
Russian by Ralph
Parker.
[original 1963]
124 pages.

ISBN: 0435122002

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

SIDDHARTHA

Hermann Hesse
1877–1962

New York, NY:
New Directions Publishing
Corporation, 1957.
Translated from the
German by Hilda Rosner.
[original 1922]
153 pages.

ISBN: 081120068X

This novel traces the life of a young Indian man, Siddhartha, as he embarks on a spiritual quest. Throughout his journey, he struggles with worldly materialism, sensuous pleasures and inner conflicts of spiritual truth.

The novel's rich imagery and numerous allusions to the life of Buddha will provide the skilled, more mature student with exposure to an Eastern philosophy. This work, however, should not be construed as a document for teaching about Buddhism.

The novel is most suitable for small groups of mature students who may wish to explore the quest motif, the metaphor of life as a journey, the difficult and elusive nature of wisdom and truth, and the complexity of the imperfections of humankind.

THE SUSPECT

L. R. Wright
1939–

George Wilcox, at the age of 80, commits the near-perfect crime. The murder happens quickly, quietly, and very unexpectedly, in a small town on the Sunshine Coast in British Columbia. This unusual turn in George's life would have gone undetected had his conscience not started to bother him. The suspense mounts as George befriends the local librarian, Cassandra Mitchell, and her new boyfriend, Karl Alberg, the local RCMP Staff Sergeant. Together, these three find themselves on a collision course of conflicting values and loyalties.

This Canadian mystery allows for the study of characterization, plot development and foreshadowing. Also, the examination of right and wrong could lead to interesting response journal writing, character analysis and the examination of points of view. Students may need help with vocabulary, particularly at the beginning of the book.

Teachers should be aware of blasphemy and scenes of domestic violence, which may be distressing to some students. However, the depiction of such violence provides a classroom opportunity to discuss the issue of domestic violence, its traumatic causes and effects.

Toronto, ON:
Seal Books, 1986.
[original 1985]
217 pages.

ISBN: 0770421229

ALICIA: MY STORY

Alicia Appleman-Jurman
19[?] -

New York, NY:
Bantam Books, 1990.
[original 1988]
433 pages.

ISBN: 0553282182

Between the ages of 10 and 15, Alicia, a Polish Jew, suffers the horrors of living and trying to survive under the Nazis. She sees her mother murdered, and experiences terrible hardships while hiding from the Nazis and their collaborators. Through luck, street sense, and the help of many good people, she is able to hide, survive and maintain her faith in the family and the essential goodness of people. Eventually, she organizes and leads a group who settle in the Palestine region. Later, she marries an American and moves to the United States.

This vivid personal account of survival, and great personal courage, deals with atrocities committed for racial and ethnic reasons; an account of man's inhumanity to man. The topic, by its very nature, may be sensitive in some communities. Teachers should also be aware that this lengthy biography contains some stereotyping of Germans and Ukrainians.

Alicia Appleman-Jurman's autobiography, however, has the potential to broaden understanding and sensitivity to personal sufferings and to holocaust events. While chapters are short, the book may be most appropriate for small group or individual study.

BUSH PILOT WITH A BRIEFCASE: THE HAPPY-GO-LUCKY STORY OF GRANT McCONACHIE

Ronald A. Keith
1914[?]–1985

From his youth in Edmonton to, at age 38, his rise to president of Canadian Pacific Airlines, and through his continuing escapades, Grant McConachie was an irrepressible figure. As an early bush pilot flying over the rugged and dangerous northland, his ebullient self-assurance, sheer force of personality, and luck, enabled a meteoric rise to the top.

This biography, written in a well-paced and colourful style, is an easy, absorbing read. Despite careful focus on McConachie, the result seems more a surface treatment than an analytical study. The book illustrates the effects of personal relationships and the force of personality in achieving success.

Markham, ON:
PaperJacks Ltd., 1973.
[original 1972]
322 pages.

ISBN: 0770102093

Note: This edition was on the 1983 Senior High Novels and Nonfiction list. There may be a more current edition available.

DEATH AND DELIVERANCE: THE HAUNTING TRUE STORY OF THE HERCULES CRASH AT THE NORTH POLE

Robert Mason Lee
1956–

Toronto, ON:
Macfarlane Walter &
Ross, 1992.
271 pages.

ISBN: 0921912498

On October 31, 1991 a military transport airplane crashed 10 miles short of its destination Alert, North West Territories. Fourteen people survived the crash to face a bitter arctic storm with little protection. Hampered by weather and inadequate and outdated equipment, Canadian search and rescue technicians, or Sartechs, risked their own lives to save the survivors. A number of Edmontonians were involved in the crash and the rescue.

This intensely personal account reveals the thoughts, feelings and dreams of the survivors and their rescuers during the three tense days between leaving the south and arriving in Alert. The occasional use of vulgar language is realistic in time, character and situation. This easy-to-read survival story may be especially appealing to male students or to those who enjoy plentiful technical details.

WALKING WITH THE GREAT APES: JANE GOODALL, DIAN FOSSEY, BIRUTÉ GALDIKAS

Sy Montgomery
1958–

New York, NY:
Houghton Mifflin
Company, 1991.
280 pages.

ISBN: 0395611563

Jane Goodall's work with the chimpanzees of Gombe; Dian Fossey's defence of the mountain gorillas of Risande; and Biruté Galdikas' study of orangutans in Borneo, present a composite picture of three women who forge careers through their study of primates. While this book portrays the work of these women, it also compares the different psychological characteristics of each researcher and is, therefore, as much a perceptive study of the women as it is of the primates.

Different perspectives can be obtained from reading this book. From one point of view, three admirable women scientists are presented as role models and innovative leaders in their field. Also, it can be viewed as a perceptive and insightful portrait of feminist ideas. From another point of view, the book could be interpreted as extreme and bizarre, and illustrative of a spiritual relationship with animals that could be defined as animistic, or possibly even shamanistic. While there are images of death, sexuality and violence, a study of this nonfiction book could give students insight into various ways of seeing, understanding and appreciating others, especially those with different cultures, religious and belief systems. It might be best offered on an optional basis.

This book is a fascinating read for a wide range of student abilities and interests. Further reading on environmentalism and interaction with nature could easily follow.

CHALLENGES TO BOOK SELECTION

Challenges to book selection occasionally arise. Challenges may be based on the ideas in a book, the maturity required for understanding them, or the language used to express those ideas. Since the school is a reflection of society, it represents various points of view and makes resources available that allow students to explore those points of view that are within their understanding.

If a resource is challenged, every attempt should be made to resolve the matter at the school level. The ideas from the National Council of Teachers of English material known as "The Right to Read" (see pages 6–8), the selection criteria guidelines for the titles on this list (see page 1) and the Toronto Board of Education's arguments for the continued use of good literature in the classroom (see page 9) may help to present the rationale for studying and discussing authors' viewpoints through their writing and in terms of their historical periods.

When questions occur, the following procedures may be helpful.

- Encourage the challenger to read the entire resource prior to discussion.
- Reviews of the book available from the public library, from the annotation in this document, etc., may be useful.
- Attempt to resolve the issue informally through discussion and consensus. The English teacher and administrator could:
  - explain the selection procedure and criteria
  - explain the reason for the book's inclusion in the English course
  - indicate that every parent's right to restrict his or her own child's reading is acknowledged, but that the rights of other parents to have the resource available to their children should also be respected.

In the classroom, the teacher can usually respond to a challenge by giving the student a choice of alternative titles to choose from. Generally, this will defuse most concerns that may arise.

Alberta Education has a *Controversial Issues Policy*. Details of the policy follow.

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES POLICY

BACKGROUND

★*Controversial issues are those topics which are publicly sensitive and on which there is no consensus of values or belief. By their nature, controversial issues generate diverse opinions and debate on the distinctions between right and wrong, justice and injustice, and on interpretations of fairness and tolerance. They include topics on which reasonable people may sincerely disagree.*

Opportunities to deal with sensitive issues and topics are an integral part of the education programs and schooling process in Alberta. Alberta Education recognizes that education cannot remain neutral on all issues or avoid all topics that are controversial. Alberta Education also recognizes that courses of study and education programs offered in Alberta schools must handle controversial issues in a manner that respects the rights and opinions reflected in different perspectives, but that rejects extreme or unethical positions.

For sound judgments to be made, students should have experiences in selecting, organizing and evaluating information. The educational benefits to be gained by studying controversial issues include the development of critical thinking, moral reasoning, and an awareness and understanding of contemporary society.

POLICY

Alberta Education believes that studying controversial issues is important in preparing students to participate responsibly in a democratic and pluralistic society. Such study provides opportunities to develop students' capacities to think clearly, to reason logically, to open-mindedly and respectfully examine different points of view, and to reach sound judgments.

LEGISLATION

School Act

25(1) The Minister may do the following:

. . . . . .

(e) subject to the right of a board to provide religious instruction, by order prohibit the use of a course, an education program or instructional material in schools; . . .

★ Source: *Alberta Education Policy Manual*, Document Number 02-01-07, Alberta Education, September 10, 1991.

Other legislation:

Alberta Bill of Rights, R.S.A. 1980, Chapter A-16

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, *Constitution Act*, 1982

PROCEDURES

The Ministerial Order under section 25(1)(f) of the Act *as cited in the Ministerial Orders and Directives section of this Policy Manual.*

1. *Sensitivity on the part of teachers, students and other participants in controversial issues shall be exercised to ensure that students and others are not ridiculed, embarrassed, intimidated or degraded for positions which they hold on controversial issues.*

2. *Information regarding controversial issues should:*
   (a) represent alternative points of view, subject to the condition that resources used are not restricted by any federal or provincial law;
   (b) appropriately reflect the maturity, capabilities and educational needs of the students;
   (c) meet the requirements of provincially prescribed and approved courses of study and education programs; and
   (d) reflect the neighbourhood and community in which the school is located, as well as provincial, national and international contexts.

3. *Controversial issues which have been pre-planned by the teacher and those which may arise incidentally in the course of instruction should be used by the teacher to promote critical inquiry rather than advocacy, and to teach students how to think rather than what to think.*

4. *The school should play a supportive role to parents in the areas of values and moral development, and shall handle parental decisions in regard to Controversial Issues with respect and sensitivity.*

The *Controversial Issues Policy* should be used as a guide in presenting various points of view about an issue raised in a novel or piece of nonfiction. In part, this policy states *in principle, it is an objective of the Alberta educational system to develop students' capacities to think clearly, reason logically, examine all issues and reach sound judgments.* Frequently these types of works present only one or two viewpoints on an issue. In discussing the issue in class, teachers should encourage the discussion of the other viewpoints as well.

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